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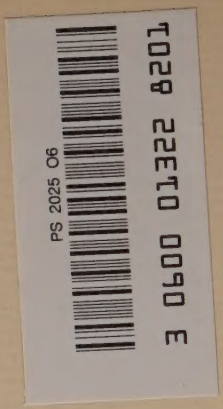

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AN OPEN-EYED CONSPIRACY

AN IDYL OF SARATOGA

No 1593

BY

W. D. HOWELLS

AUTHOR OF "THE LANDLORD AT LION'S HEAD"
"THE COAST OF BOHEMIA" "APRIL HOPES"
"A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES" ETC.

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AN OPEN-EYED CONSPIRACY:

A SARATOGA IDYL.

I.

The day had been very hot under the tall trees which everywhere embower and stifle Saratoga, for they shut out the air as well as the sun; and after tea (they still have an early dinner at all the hotels in Saratoga, and tea is the last meal of the day) I strolled over to the pretty Congress Park, in the hope of getting a breath of coolness there. Mrs. March preferred to take the chances on the veranda of our pleasant little hotel, where I left her with the other ladies, forty fanning like one, as they rocked to and fro under the roof lifted to the third story by those lofty shafts peculiar to the Saratoga architecture. As far as coolness was concerned I thought she was wise after I reached the park, for I found none of it there. I tried first a chair in the arabesque pavilion (I call it arabesque in despair; it might very well be Swiss; it is charming, at

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all events), and studied to deceive myself with the fresh-looking ebullition of the spring in the vast glass bowls your goblets are served from (people say it is pumped, and artificially aërated); but after a few moments this would not do, and I went out to a bench, of the rows beside the graveled walks. It was no better there; but I fancied it would be better on the little isle in the little lake, where the fountain was flinging a sheaf of spray into the dull air. This looked even cooler than the bubbling spring in the glass vases, and it sounded vastly cooler. There would be mosquitos there, of course, I admitted in the debate I had with myself before I decided to make experiment of the place, and the event proved me right. There were certainly some mosquitos in the Grecian temple (if it is not a Turkish kiosk; perhaps we had better compromise, and call it a Grecian kiosk), which you reach by a foot-bridge from the mainland, and there was a damp in the air which might pass for coolness. There were three or four people standing vaguely about in the kiosk; but my idle mind fixed itself upon a young French-Canadian mother of low degree, who sat, with her small boy, on the verge of the pavement near the water. She scolded him in their parlance for having got himself so dirty, and then she smacked his poor,

filthy little hands, with a frown of superior virtue, though I did not find her so very much cleaner herself. I cannot see children beaten without a heart-ache, and I continued to suffer for this small wretch even after he had avenged himself by eating a handful of peanut shells, which would be sure to disagree with him and make his mother more trouble. In fact, I experienced no relief till his mother, having spent her insensate passion, gathered him up with sufficient tenderness, and carried him away. Then, for the first time, I noticed a girl sitting in a chair just outside the kiosk, and showing a graceful young figure as she partly turned to look after the departing mother and her child. When she turned again and glanced in my direction, at the noise I made in placing my chair, I could see two things—that she had as much beauty as grace, and that she was disappointed in me. The latter fact did not wound me, for I felt its profound impersonality. I was not wrong in myself; I was simply wrong in being an elderly man with a gray beard instead of the handsome shape and phase of youth which her own young beauty had a right to in my place. I was not only not wounded, but I was not sorry not to be that shape and phase of youth, except as I hate to disappoint any one.

Her face was very beautiful; it was quite perfectly beautiful, and of such classic mould that she might well have been the tutelary goddess of that temple (if it was a temple, and not a kiosk), in the white duck costume which the goddesses were wearing that summer. Her features were Greek, but her looks were American; and she was none the less a goddess, I decided, because of that air of something exacting, of not quite satisfied, which made me more and more willing to be elderly and gray-bearded. I at least should not be expected to supply the worship necessary to keep such a goddess in good humor.

I do not know just how I can account for a strain of compassion which mingled with this sense of irresponsibility in me; perhaps it was my feeling of security that attuned me to pity; but certainly I did not look at this young girl long without beginning to grieve for her, and to weave about her a web of possibilities, which grew closer and firmer in texture when she was joined by a couple who had apparently not left her a great while before, and who spoke, without otherwise saluting her, as they sat down on either side of her. I instantly interpreted her friends to be the young wife and middle-aged husband of a second marriage; for they were evidently man and wife, and he

must have been nearly twice as old as she. In person he tended to the weight which expresses settled prosperity, and a certain solidification of temperament and character; as to his face, it was kind, and it was rather humorous, in spite of being a little slow in the cast of mind it suggested. He wore an iron-gray beard on his cheeks and chin, but he had his strong upper lip clean shaven; some drops of perspiration stood upon it, and upon his forehead, which showed itself well up toward his crown under the damp strings of his scanty hair. He looked at the young goddess in white duck with a sort of trouble in his friendly countenance, and his wife (if it was his wife) seemed to share his concern, though she smiled, while he let the corners of his straight mouth droop. She was smaller than the young girl, and I thought almost as young; and she had the air of being somehow responsible for her, and cowed by her, though the word says rather more than I mean. She was not so well dressed; that is, not so stylishly, though doubtless her costume was more expensive. It seemed the inspiration of a village dressmaker; and her husband's low-cut waistcoat, and his expanse of plaited shirt-front, betrayed a provincial ideal which she would never decry—which she would perhaps never find different from the most worldly.

He had probably, I swiftly imagined, been wearing just that kind of clothes for twenty years, and telling his tailor to make each new suit like the last; he had been buying for the same period the same shape of Panama hat, regardless of the continually changing type of straw hats on other heads. I cannot say just why, as he tilted his chair back on its hind-legs, I felt that he was either the cashier of the village bank at home, or one of the principal business men of the place. Village people I was quite resolute to have them all; but I left them free to have come from some small manufacturing centre in western Massachusetts or southern Vermont or central New York. It was easy to see that they were not in the habit of coming away from their place, wherever it was; and I wondered whether they were finding their account in the present excursion.

I myself think Saratoga one of the most delightful spectacles in the world, and Mrs. March is of the same mind about it. We like all the waters, and drink them without regard to their different properties; but we rather prefer the Congress spring, because it is such a pleasant place to listen to the Troy military band in the afternoon, and the more or less vocal concert in the evening. All the Saratoga world comes and goes

before us, as we sit there by day and by night, and we find a perpetual interest in it. We go and look at the deer (a herd of two, I think) behind their wire netting in the southward valley of the park, and we would feed the trout in their blue tank if we did not see them suffering with surfeit, and hanging in motionless misery amid the clear water under a cloud of bread crumbs. We are such devotees of the special attractions offered from time to time that we do not miss a single balloon ascension or pyrotechnic display. In fact, it happened to me one summer that I studied so earnestly and so closely the countenance of the lady who went up (in trunk-hose), in order to make out just what were the emotions of a lady who went up every afternoon in a balloon, that when we met near the end of the season in Broadway I thought I must have seen her somewhere in society, and took off my hat to her (she was not at the moment in trunk-hose). We like going about to the great hotels, and sponging on them for the music in the forenoon; we like the gaudy shops of modes kept by artists whose addresses are French and whose surnames are Irish; and the bazaars of the Armenians and Japanese, whose rugs and bric-à-brac are not such bargains as you would think. We even go to the races sometimes; we are not sure it is quite

right, but as we do not bet, and are never decided as to which horse has won, it is perhaps not so wrong as it might be.

Somehow I could not predicate these simple joys of the people I have been talking of, for the very reason that they were themselves so simple. It was our sophistication which enabled us to taste pleasures which would have been insipidities to them. Their palates would have demanded other flavors—social excitements, balls, flirtations, almost escapades. I speak of the two women; the man, doubtless, like most other Americans of his age, wanted nothing but to get back to business in the small town where he was important; and still more I speak of the young girl; for the young wife I fancied very willing to go back to her housekeeping, and to be staying on in Saratoga only on her friend's account.

II.

I HAD already made up my mind that they had been the closest friends before one of them married, and that the young wife still thought the young girl worthy of the most splendid fate that marriage could have in store for any of her sex. Women often make each other the idols of such worship; but I could not have justified this lady's adoration so far as it concerned the mental and moral qualities of her friend, though I fully shared it in regard to her beauty. To me she looked a little dull and a little selfish, and I chose to think the husband modestly found her selfish, if he were too modest to find her dull.

Yet, after all, I tacitly argued with him, why should we call her selfish? It was perfectly right and fit that, as a young girl with such great personal advantages, she should wish to see the world,—even to show herself to the world,—and find in it some agreeable youth who should admire her, and desire to make her his own forever. Compare this simple and natural

longing with the insatiate greed and ambition of one of our own sex, I urged him, and then talk to me, if you can, of this poor girl's selfishness! A young man has more egoism in an hour than a young girl has in her whole life. She thinks she wishes some one to be devoted to her, but she really wishes some one to let her be devoted to him; and how passively, how negatively, she must manage to accomplish her self-sacrifice! He, on the contrary, means to go conquering and enslaving forward; to be in and out of love right and left, and to end, after many years of triumph, in the possession of the best and wisest and fairest of her sex. I know the breed, my dear sir; I have been a young man myself. We men have liberty, we have initiative; we are not chaperoned; we can go to this one and that one freely and fearlessly. But women must sit still, and be come to or shied off from. They cannot cast the bold eye of interest; they can at most bridle under it, and furtively respond from the corner of the eye of weak hope and gentle deprecation. Be patient, then, with this poor child if she darkles a little under the disappointment of not finding Saratoga so personally gay as she supposed it would be, and takes it out of you and your wife, as if you were to blame for it, in something like sulks.

He remained silent under these tacit appeals, but at the end he heaved a deep sigh, as he might if he were acknowledging their justice, and were promising to do his very best in the circumstances. His wife looked round at him, but did not speak. In fact, they none of them spoke after the first words of greeting to the girl, as I can very well testify; for I sat eavesdropping with all my might, resolved not to lose a syllable, and I am sure I lost none.

The young girl did not look round at that deep-drawn sigh of the man's; she did not lift her head even when he cleared his throat: but I was intent upon him, for I thought that these sounds preluded an overture (I am not sure of the figure) to my acquaintance, and in fact he actually asked, "Do you know just when the concert begins?"

I was overjoyed at his question, for I was poignantly interested in the little situation I had created, and I made haste to answer: "Well, nominally at eight o'clock; but the first half-hour is usually taken up in tuning the instruments. If you get into the pavilion at a quarter to nine you won't lose much. It isn't so bad when it really begins."

The man permitted himself a smile of the pleasure we Americans all feel at having a thing understated

in that way. His wife asked timidly, "Do we have to engage our seats in the—pavilion?"

"Oh, no," I laughed; "there's no such rush as that. Haven't you been at the concerts before?"

The man answered for her: "We haven't been here but a few days. I should think," he added to her, "it would be about as comfortable outside of the house." I perceived that he maintained his independence of my superior knowledge by refusing to say "pavilion"; and in fact I do not know whether that is the right name for the building myself.

"It will be hot enough anywhere," I assented, as if the remark had been made to me; but here I drew the line out of self-respect, and resolved that he should make the next advances.

The young girl looked up at the first sound of my voice, and verified me as the elderly man whom she had seen before; and then she looked down at the water again. I understood, and I freely forgave her. If my beard had been brown instead of gray I should have been an adventure; but to the eye of girlhood adventure can never wear a gray beard. I was truly sorry for her; I could read in the pensive droop of her averted face that I was again a disappointment.

They all three sat, without speaking again, in the

mannerless silence of Americans. The man was not going to feel bound in further civility to me because I had civilly answered a question of his. I divined that he would be glad to withdraw from the overture he had made; he may have thought from my readiness to meet him half way that I might be one of those sharpers in whom Saratoga probably abounded. This did not offend me; it amused me; I fancied his confusion if he could suddenly know how helplessly and irreparably honest I was.

"I don't know but it's a little too damp here, Rufus," said the wife.

"I don't know but it is," he answered; but none of them moved, and none of them spoke again for some minutes. Then the wife said again, but this time to the friend, "I don't know but it's a little too damp here, Julia," and the friend answered, as the husband had:

"I don't know but it is."

I had two surprises in this slight event. I could never have imagined that the girl had so brunette a name as Julia, or anything less blond in sound than, say, Evadne, at the very darkest; and I had made up my mind—Heaven knows why—that her voice would be harsh. Perhaps I thought it unfair that she should

have a sweet voice added to all that beauty and grace of hers; but she had a sweet voice, very tender and melodious, with a plangent note in it that touched me and charmed me. Beautiful and graceful as she was, she had lacked atmosphere before, and now suddenly she had atmosphere. I resolved to keep as near to these people as I could, and not to leave the place as long as they stayed; but I did not think it well to let them feel that I was æsthetically shadowing them, and I got up and strolled away toward the pavilion, keeping an eye in the back of my head upon them.

I sat down in a commanding position, and watched the people gathering for the concert; and in the drama of a group of Cubans, or of South Americans, I almost forgot for a moment the pale idyl of my compatriots at the kiosk. There was a short, stout little Spanish woman speaking in the shapely sentences which the Latin race everywhere delights in, and around her was an increasing number of serious Spanish men, listening as if to important things, and paying her that respectful attention which always amuses and puzzles me. In view of what we think their low estimate of women, I cannot make out whether it is a personal tribute to some specific woman whom they regard differently from all the rest of her sex, or whether they

choose to know in her for the nonce the abstract woman who is better than woman in the concrete. I am sure I have never seen men of any other race abandon themselves to such a luxury of respect as these black and gray bearded Spaniards of leaden complexion showed this dumpy personification of womanhood, with their prominent eyes bent in homage upon her, and their hands trembling with readiness to seize their hats off in reverence. It appeared presently that the matter they were all canvassing so devoutly was the question of where she should sit. It seemed to be decided that she could not do better than sit just at that point. When she actually took a chair the stately convocation ended, and its members, with low obeisances, dispersed themselves in different directions. They had probably all been sitting with her the whole afternoon on the veranda of the Everett House, where their race chiefly resorts in Saratoga, and they were availing themselves of this occasion to appear to be meeting her, after a long interval, in society.

I said to myself that of course they believed Saratoga was still that centre of American fashion which it once was, and that they came and went every summer, probably in the belief that they saw a great deal of social gayety there. This made me think, by a

natural series of transitions, of the persons of my American idyl, and I looked about the pavilion everywhere for them without discovering, till the last, that they were just behind me.

I found the fact touching. They had not wished to be in any wise beholden to me, and had even tried to reject my friendly readiness to know them better; but they had probably sought my vicinity in a sense of their loneliness and helplessness, which they hoped I would not divine, but which I divined instantly. Still, I thought it best not to show any consciousness of them, and we sat through the first part of the concert without taking notice of one another. Then the man leaned forward and touched me on the shoulder.

"Will you let me take your programme a minute?"

"Why, certainly," said I.

He took it, and after a vague glance at it he passed it to his wife, who gave it in turn to the young girl. She studied it very briefly, and then, after a questioning look, offered it back to me.

"Won't you keep it?" I entreated. "I've quite done with it."

"Oh, thank you," she answered in her tender voice, and she and the wife looked hard at the man, whom they seemed to unite in pushing forward by that means.

He hemmed, and asked, "Have you been in Saratoga much?"

"Why, yes," I said; "rather a good deal. My wife and I have been here three or four summers."

At the confession of my married state, which this statement implicated, the women exchanged a glance, I fancied, of triumph, as if they had been talking about me, and I had now confirmed the ground they had taken concerning me. Then they joined in goading the man on again with their eyes.

"Which hotel," he asked, "should you say had the most going on?"

The young girl and the wife transferred their gaze to me, with an intensified appeal in it. The man looked away with a certain shame—the shame of a man who feels that his wife has made him make an ass of himself. I tried to treat his question, by the quantity and quality of my answer, as one of the most natural things in the world; and I probably deceived them all by this effort, though I am sure that I was most truthful and just concerning the claims of the different hotels to be the centre of excitement. I thought I had earned the right to ask at the end, "Are you stopping at the Grand Union?"

"No," he said; and he mentioned one of the smaller

hotels, which depend upon the great houses for the entertainment of their guests. "Are you there?" he asked, meaning the Grand Union.

"Oh, no," I said; "we couldn't do that sort of thing, even if we wanted." And in my turn I named the modest hotel where we were, and said that I thought it by all odds the pleasantest place in Saratoga. "But I can't say," I added, "that there is a great deal going on there, either. If you want that sort of thing you will have to go to some of the great hotels. We have our little amusements, but they're all rather mild." I kept talking to the man, but really addressing myself to the women. "There's something nearly every evening: prestidigitating, or elocutioning, or a little concert, or charades, or impromptu theatricals, or something of that sort. I can't say there's dancing, though really, I suppose, if any one wanted to dance there would be dancing."

I was aware that the women listened intelligently, even if the man did not. The wife drew a long breath, and said, "It must be very pleasant."

The girl said,—rather more hungrily, I fancied,—"Yes, indeed."

I don't know why their interest should have prompted me to go on and paint the lily a little, but I certainly

did so. I did not stop till the music began again, and I had to stop. By the time the piece was finished I had begun to have my misgivings, and I profited by the brief interval of silence to say to the young girl, "I wouldn't have you think we are a whirl of gayety exactly."

"Oh, no," she answered pathetically, as if she were quite past expecting that or anything like it.

We were silent again. At the end of the next piece they all rose, and the wife said timidly to me, "Well, good-evening," as if she might be venturing too far; and her husband came to her rescue with, "Well, good-evening, sir." The young girl merely bowed.

I did not stay much longer, for I was eager to get home and tell my wife about my adventure, which seemed to me of a very rare and thrilling kind. I believed that if I could present it to her duly, it would interest her as much as it had interested me. But somehow, as I went on with it in the lamplight of her room, it seemed to lose color and specific character.

"You are always making up these romances about young girls being off and disappointed of a good time ever since we saw that poor little Kitty Ellison with

her cousins at Niagara," said Mrs. March. "You seem to have it on the brain."

"Because it's the most tragical thing in the world, and the commonest in our transition state," I retorted. I was somewhat exasperated to have my romance treated as so stale a situation, though I was conscious now that it did want perfect novelty. "It's precisely for that reason that I like to break my heart over it. I see it every summer, and it keeps me in a passion of pity. Something ought to be done about it."

"Well, don't *you* try to do anything, Basil, unless you write to the newspapers."

"I suppose," I said, "that if the newspapers could be got to take hold of it, perhaps something might be done." The notion amused me; I went on to play with it, and imagined Saratoga, by a joint effort of the leading journals, recolonized with the social life that once made it the paradise of young people.

"I have been writing to the children," said my wife, "and telling them to stay on at York Harbor if the Herricks want them to so much. They would hate it here. You say the girl looked cross. I can't exactly imagine a cross goddess."

"There were lots of cross goddesses," I said rather crossly myself; for I saw that, after having trodden

my romance in the dust, she was willing I should pick it up again and shake it off, and I wished to show her that I was not to be so lightly appeased.

"Perhaps I was thinking of angels," she murmured.

"I distinctly didn't say she was an angel," I returned.

"Now, come, Basil; I see you're keeping something back. What did you try to do for those people? Did you tell them where you were stopping?"

"Yes, I did. They asked me, and I told them."

"Did you brag the place up?"

"On the contrary, I understated its merits."

"Oh, very well, then," she said, quite as if I had confessed my guilt; "they will come here, and you will have your romance on your hands for the rest of the month. I'm thankful we're going away the first of August."

III.

The next afternoon, while we were sitting in the park waiting for the Troy band to begin playing, and I was wondering just when they would reach the "Washington Post March," which I like because I can always be sure of it, my unknown friends came strolling our way. The man looked bewildered and bored, with something of desperation in his troubled eye, and his wife looked tired and disheartened. The young girl, still in white duck, wore the same air of passive injury I had noted in her the night before. Their faces all three lighted up at sight of me; but they faded again at the cold and meagre response I made to their smiles under correction of my wife's fears of them. I own it was base of me; but I had begun to feel myself that it might be too large a contract to attempt their consolation, and, in fact, after one is fifty scarcely any romance will keep overnight.

My wife glanced from them to me, and read my

cowardly mind; but she waited till they passed, as they did after an involuntary faltering in front of us, and were keeping on down the path, looking at the benches, which were filled on either hand. She said, "Weren't those your friends?"

"They were the persons of my romance."

"No matter. Go after them instantly, and bring them back here, poor things. We can make room for them."

I rose. "Isn't this a little too idyllic? Aren't you rather overdoing it?"

"Don't speak to me, Basil! I never heard of anything so atrocious. Go on your knees to them if they refuse! They can sit here with me, and you and he can stand. Fly!"

I knew she was punishing me for her own reluctance; but I flew, in that sense of the term, and easily overhauled them in the tangle of people coming and going in the path, and the nurse-maids pushing their perambulators in either direction. Hat in hand, I delivered my message. I could see that it gave the women great pleasure and the man some doubt. His mouth fell open a little; their cheeks flushed and their eyes shone.

"I don't know as we better," the wife hesitated;

"I'm afraid we'll crowd you." And she looked wistfully toward my wife. The young girl looked at her.

"Not at all!" I cried. "There's an abundance of room. My wife's keeping the places for you,"—in fact, I saw her putting her arm out along the bench, and explaining to a couple who had halted in front of her that the seats were taken,—"and she'll be disappointed."

"Well," the woman consented, with a little sigh of triumph that touched me, and reanimated all my interest in her and in her friend. She said, with a sort of shy, instinctive politeness, "I don't know as you and Mr. Deering got acquainted last night."

"My name is March," I said, and I shook the hand of Mr. Deering. It was rather thick.

"And this is our friend," Mrs. Deering went on, in presentation of me to the young lady, "Miss Gage, that's come with us."

I was delighted that I had guessed their relative qualities so perfectly, and when we arrived at Mrs. March I glibly presented them. My wife was all that I could have wished her to be of sympathetic and intelligent. She did not overdo it by shaking hands, but she made places for the ladies, smiling cordially; and Mrs. Deering made Miss Gage take the seat between

them. Her husband and I stood awhile in front of them, and then I said we would go off and find chairs somewhere.

We did not find any till we had climbed to the upland at the southeast of the park, and then only two iron ones, which it was useless to think of transporting. But there was no reason why we should not sit in them where they were: we could keep the ladies in plain sight, and I could not mistake "Washington Post" when the band came to it. Mr. Deering sank into one of the chairs with a sigh of satisfaction which seemed to complete itself when he discovered in the thick grass at his feet a twig from one of the tall, slim pines above us. He bent over for it, and then, as he took out his penknife and clicked open a blade to begin whittling, he cast up a critical glance at the trees.

"Pretty nice pines," he said; and he put his hand on the one next to us with a sort of appreciation that interested me.

"Yes; the trees of Saratoga are the glory of the place," I returned. "I never saw them grow anywhere else so tall and slim. It doesn't seem the effect of crowding either. It's as if there was some chemical force in the soil that shot them up. They're like rockets that haven't left the ground yet."

"It's the crowding," he said seriously, as if the subject were not to be trifled with. "It's the habit of all these trees—pines and oaks and maples, I don't care what they are—to spread, and that's what we tell our customers. Give the trees plenty of room; don't plant 'em too thick if you want to get all the good out of 'em." As if he saw a question in my eye, he went on: "We do a forest-tree business exclusively; these shade-trees, and walnuts, hickories, chestnuts, and all kinds. It's a big trade, getting to be, and growing all the time. Folks have begun to find out what fools they were to destroy the forests, and the children want to buy back what the fathers threw away."

I scarcely needed to prompt him; he was only too glad to talk on about his business, and he spoke with a sort of homesick fondness. He told me that he had his nurseries at De Witt Point, up on the St. Lawrence, where he could raise stock hardy enough for any climate, and ship by land or water.

"I've got to be getting home right away now," he said finally, clicking his knife-blade half shut and open with his thumb. "It's about time for our evergreen trade, and I don't want the trees to stay a minute in the ground after the middle of the month."

"Won't the ladies find it hard to tear themselves away from the gayeties of Saratoga?" I asked with apparent vagueness.

"Well, that's it," said Mr. Deering; and he shut his knife and slipped it into his pocket, in order to take his knee between his clasped hands and lift his leg from the ground. I have noticed that this is a philosophical attitude with some people, and I was prepared by it for some thoughtful generalizing from my companion. "Women would be willing to stay on in a place for a year to see if something wouldn't happen; and if you take 'em away before anything happens, they'll always think that if they'd stayed something would have happened the next day, or maybe the day they left."

He stared upward into the pine boughs, and I said: "Yes, that's so. I suppose we should be like them if we had the same conditions. Their whole life is an expectation of something to happen. Men have the privilege of making things happen—or trying to."

"Oh, I don't know as I want to criticise 'em. As you say, I guess *we* should be just so." He dropped his leg, and bent over as if to examine the grass; he ended by taking a blade of it between his teeth before he spoke again, with his head still down. "I don't

want to hurry 'em; I want to give 'em a fair show now we're here, and I'll let the stock go as long as I can. But I don't see very much *gayety* around."

I laughed. "Why, it's *all* gayety, in one way. Saratoga is a perpetual Fourth of July, we think."

"Oh, yes; there's enough going on, and my wife and me we could enjoy it first rate."

"If the young lady could?" I ventured, with a smile of sympathetic intelligence.

"Well, yes. You see, we don't know anybody, and I suppose we didn't take that into account. Well, I suppose it's like this: they thought it would be easy to get acquainted in the hotel, and commence having a good time right away. I don't know; my wife had the idea when they cooked it up amongst 'em that she was to come with us. But I *swear I* don't know how to go about it. I can't seem to make up my mouth to speak to folks first; and then you can't tell whether a man ain't a gambler, or on for the horse-races anyway. So we've been here a week now, and you're the first ones we've spoken to besides the waiters since we came."

I couldn't help laughing, their experience was so exactly as I had imagined it when I first saw this disconsolate party. In my triumph at my own penetra-

tion, I would not have had their suffering in the past one pang the less; but the simple frankness of his confession fixed me in the wish that the future might be brighter for them. I thought myself warranted by my wife's imprudence in taking a step toward their further intimacy on my own account, and I said: "Well, perhaps I ought to tell you that I haven't been inside the Saratoga Club or bet on the races since I've been here. That's my name in full,"—and I gave him my card,—"and I'm in the literary line; that is, I'm the editor of a magazine in New York—the 'Every Other Week.'"

"Oh, yes; I know who *you* are," said my companion, with my card in his hand. "Fact is, I was round at your place this morning trying to get rooms, and the clerk told me all about you from my description. I felt as mean as pu'sley goin'; seemed to be takin' kind of an advantage of you."

"Not at all; it's a public house," I interrupted; but I thought I should be stronger with Mrs. March if I did not give the fact away to her, and I resolved to keep it.

"But they couldn't rest easy till I tried, and I was more than half glad there wasn't any rooms."

"Oh, I'm very sorry," I said; and I indulged a real

regret from the vantage I had. "It would have been very pleasant to have you there. Perhaps later—we shall be giving up our rooms at the end of the month."

"No," he said, with a long breath. "If I've got to leave 'em, I guess it'll be just as well to leave 'em where they're acquainted with the house, anyway." His remark betrayed a point in his thinking which had not perhaps been reached in his talk with the ladies. "It's a quiet place, and they're used to it; and I guess they wouldn't want to stay through the rest of the month, quite. I don't believe my wife would, anyway."

He did not say this very confidently, but hopefully rather, and I thought it afforded me an opening to find out something yet more definite about the ladies.

"Miss Gage is remarkably fine-looking," I began.

"Think so?" he answered. "Well, so does my wife. I don't know as I like her style exactly," he said, with a kind of latent grudge.

"Her style is magnificent," I insisted.

"Well, maybe so. I guess she's good enough looking, if that's what you mean. But I think it's always a kind of a mistake for three persons to come off together, I don't care who they are. Then there's three opinions. She's a nice girl, and a good girl, and she

don't put herself forward. But when you've got a young lady on your hands, you've *got* her, and you feel bound to keep doin' something for her all the time; and if you don't know what to do yourself, and your wife can't tell—"

I added intelligently, "Yes."

"Well, that's just where it is. Sometimes I wish the whole dumn town would burn up." I laughed and laughed; and my friend, having begun to unpack his heart, went on to ease it of the rest of its load. I had not waited for this before making some reflections concerning him, but I now formulated them to myself. He really had none of that reserve I had attributed to him the night before; it was merely caution; and this is the case with most country people. They are cautious, but not reserved; if they think they can trust you, they keep back none of their affairs; and this is the American character, for we are nearly all country people. I understood him perfectly when he said, "I ruther break stone than go through what I have been through the last week! You understand how it is. 'Tain't as if she said anything; I wish she would; but you feel all the while that it ain't what she expected it to be, and you feel as if it was you that was to blame for the failure. By George! if any man was to

come along and make an offer for my contract I would sell out cheap. It's worse because my wife asked her to come, and thought she was doin' her all kinds of a favor to let her. They've always been great friends since they were little girls together, and when we talked of coming to Saratoga this summer, nothing would do my wife but Julia must come with us. Her and her father usually take a trip off somewhere in the hot weather, but this time he couldn't leave; president of our National Bank, and president of the village, too." He threw in the fact of these dignities explanatorily, but with a willingness, I could see, that it should affect me. He went on: "They're kind of connections of my first wife's. Well, she's a nice girl; too nice, I guess, to get along very fast. I see girls all the way along down gettin' acquainted on the cars and boats,—we come east on the Ogdensburg road to Rouse's Point, and then took the boat down Lake Champlain and Lake George,—but she always seemed to hold back. I don't know's she's proud either; I can't make it out. It balls my wife all up, too. I tell her she's fretted off all the good her trip's goin' to do her before she got it."

He laughed ruefully, and just then the band began to play the "Washington Post."

"What tune's that?" he demanded.

"'Washington Post,'" I said, proud of knowing it.

"By George! that tune goes right to a fellow's legs, don't it?"

"It's the new march," I said.

He listened with a simple joy in it, and his pleasure strengthened the mystic bond which had formed itself between us through the confidences he had made me, so flatteringly corroborative of all my guesses concerning him and his party.

IV.

I LONGED to have the chance of bragging to my wife; but this chance did not come till the concert was quite over, after I rejoined her with my companion, and she could take leave of them all without seeming to abandon them. Then I judged it best to let her have the word; for I knew by the way she ran her hand through my arm, and began pushing me along out of earshot, that she was full of it.

"Well, Basil, I think that is the sweetest and simplest and kindest creature in the world, and I'm perfectly in love with her."

I did not believe somehow that she meant the girl, but I thought it best merely to suggest, "There are two."

"You know very well which I mean, and I would do anything I could for her. She's got a difficult problem before her, and I pity her. The girl's very well, and she *is* a beauty; and I suppose she *has* been

having a dull time, and of course you couldn't please Mrs. Deering half so well as by doing something for her friend. I suppose you're feeling very proud that they're just what you divined."

"Not at all; I'm so used to divining people. How did you know I knew it?"

"I saw you talking to him, and I knew you were pumping him."

"Pumping? He asked nothing better than to flow. He would put to shame the provoked spontaneity of any spring in Saratoga."

"Well, did he say that he was going to leave them here?"

"He would like to do it—yes. He was very sweet and simple and kind, too, Isabel. He complained bitterly of the goddess, and all but said she sulked."

"Why, I don't know," said my wife. "I think, considering, that she is rather amiable. She brightened up more and more."

"That was prosperity, or the hope of it, my dear. Nothing illumines us like the prospect of pleasant things. She took you for society smiling upon her, and of course she smiled back. But it's only the first smile of prosperity that cheers. If it keeps on smiling it ends by making us dissatisfied again. When

people are getting into society they are very glad; when they have got in they seem to be rather gloomy. We mustn't let these things go too far. Now that you've got your friends in good humor, the right way is to drop them—to cut them dead when you meet them, to look the other way. That will send them home perfectly radiant."

"Nonsense! I am going to do all I can for them. What do you think we can do? They haven't the first idea how to amuse themselves here. It's a miracle they ever got that dress the girl is wearing. They just made a bold dash because they saw it in a dressmaker's window the first day, and she had to have something. It's killingly becoming to her; but I don't believe they know it, and they don't begin to know how cheap it was: it was simply *thrown* away. I'm going shopping with them in the morning."

"Oh!"

"But now the question is, what we can do to give them some little glimpse of social gayety. That's what they've come for."

We were passing the corner of a large inclosure which seems devoted in Saratoga to the most distracting of its pleasures, and I said: "Well, we might give them a turn on the circular railway or the switchback;

or we could take them to the Punch and Judy drama, or get their fortunes told in the seeress's tent, or let them fire in the shooting-gallery, or buy some sweet-grass baskets of the Indians; and there is the pop-corn and the lemonade."

"I will tell you what," said Mrs. March, who had not been listening to a word I said; for if she had heard me she would not have had patience with my ironical suggestions.

"Well, what?"

"Or, no; that wouldn't do, either."

"I'm glad you don't approve of the notion, on second thoughts. I didn't like it from the beginning, and I didn't even know what it was."

"We could have them up to the house this evening, and introduce them to some of our friends,—only there isn't a young man in the whole place,—and have them stay to the charades."

"What do you think," I said, "of their having come up this morning and tried to get rooms at our house?"

"Yes; they told me."

"And don't you call that rather forthputting? It seems to me that it was taking a mean advantage of my brags."

"It was perfectly innocent in them. But now, dearest, don't be tiresome. I know that you like them as well as I do, and I will take all your little teasing affectations for granted. The question is, what can we do for them?'

"And the answer is, I don't in the least know. There isn't any society life at Saratoga that I can see; and if there is, we are not in it. How could we get any one else in? I see that's what you're aiming at. Those public socialities at the big hotels they could get into as well as we could; but they wouldn't be anywhere when they got there, and they wouldn't know what to do. You know what hollow mockeries those things are. Don't you remember that hop we went to with the young Braceys the first summer? If those girls hadn't waltzed with each other they wouldn't have danced a step the whole evening."

"I know, I know," sighed my wife; "it was terrible. But these people are so very unworldly that don't you think they could be deluded into the belief that they were seeing society if we took a little trouble? You used to be so inventive! You could think up something now if you tried."

"My dear, a girl knows beyond all the arts of hoodwinking whether she's having a good time, and your

little scheme of passing off one of those hotel hops for a festivity would never work in the world."

"Well, I think it is too bad! What has become of all the easy gayety there used to be in the world?"

"It has been starched and ironed out of it, apparently. Saratoga is still trying to do the good old American act, with its big hotels and its heterogeneous hops, and I don't suppose there's ever such a thing as a society person at any of them. That wouldn't be so bad. But the unsociety people seem to be afraid of one another. They feel that there is something in the air—something they don't and can't understand; something alien, that judges their old-fashioned American impulse to be sociable, and contemns it. No; we can't do anything for our hapless friends—I can hardly call them our acquaintances. We must avoid them, and keep them merely as a pensive color in our own vivid memories of Saratoga. If we made them have a good time, and sent them on their way rejoicing, I confess that I should feel myself distinctly a loser. As it is, they're a strain of melancholy poetry in my life, of music in the minor key. I shall always associate their pathos with this hot summer weather, and I shall think of them whenever the thermometer registers eighty-nine. Don't you see the advantage of

that? I believe I can ultimately get some literature out of them. If I can think of a fitting fable for them Fulkerson will feature it in 'Every Other Week.' He'll get out a Saratoga number, and come up here and strike the hotels and springs for ad's."

"Well," said Mrs. March, "I wish I had never seen them; and it's all your fault, Basil. Of course, when you played upon my sympathies so about them, I couldn't help feeling interested in them. We are a couple of romantic old geese, my dear."

"Not at all, or at least I'm not. I simply used these people conjecturally to give myself an agreeable pang. I didn't want to know anything more about them than I imagined, and I certainly didn't dream of doing anything for them. You'll spoil everything if you turn them from fiction into fact, and try to manipulate their destiny. Let them alone; they will work it out for themselves."

"You know I can't let them alone now," she lamented. "I am not one of those who can give themselves an agreeable pang with the unhappiness of their fellow-creatures. I'm not satisfied to study them; I want to relieve them."

She went on to praise herself to my disadvantage, as I notice wives will with their husbands, and I did not

attempt to deny her this source of consolation. But when she ended by saying, "I believe I shall send you alone," and explained that she had promised Mrs. Deering we would come to their hotel for them after tea, and go with them to hear the music at the United States and the Grand Union, I protested. I said that I always felt too sneaking when I was prowling round those hotels listening to their proprietary concerts, and I was aware of looking so sneaking that I expected every moment to be ordered off their piazzas. As for convoying a party of three strangers about alone, I should certainly not do it.

"Not if I've a headache?"

"Not if you've a headache."

"Oh, very well, then."

"What are you two quarreling about?" cried a gay voice behind us, and we looked round into the laughing eyes of Miss Dale. She was the one cottager we knew in Saratoga, but when we were with her we felt that we knew everybody, so hospitable was the sense of world which her kindness exhaled.

"It was Mrs. March who was quarreling," I said. "I was only trying to convince her that she was wrong, and of course one has to lift one's voice. I hope I hadn't the effect of holloing."

"Well, I merely heard you above the steam harmonicon at the switchback," said Miss Dale. "I don't know whether you call *that* holloing."

"Oh, Miss Dale," said my wife, "we are in such a fatal—"

"Pickle," I suggested, and she instantly adopted the word in her extremity.

"—pickle with some people that Providence has thrown in our way, and that we want to do something for;" and in a labyrinth of parentheses that no man could have found his way into or out of, she possessed Miss Dale of the whole romantic fact. "It was Mr. March, of course, who first discovered them," she concluded, in plaintive accusation.

"Poor Mr. March!" cried Miss Dale. "Well, it is a pathetic case, but it isn't the only one, if that's any comfort. Saratoga is reeking with just such forlornities the whole summer long; but I can quite understand how you feel about it, Mrs. March." We came to a corner, and she said abruptly: "Excuse my interrupting your quarrel! Not quite so *loud*, Mr. March!" and she flashed back a mocking look at me as she skurried off down the street with astonishing rapidity.

"How perfectly heartless!" cried my wife. "I

certainly thought she would suggest something—offer to do something."

"I relied upon her, too," I said; "but now I have my doubts whether she was really going down that street till she saw that it was the best way to escape. We're certainly in trouble, my dear, if people avoid us in this manner."

V.

"I AM doing it entirely on Mrs. Deering's account," said my wife that evening after tea, as we walked down the side-street that descended from our place to Broadway. "She has that girl on her hands, and I know she must be at her wits' end."

"And I do it entirely on Deering's account," I retorted. "He has both of those women on *his* hands."

We emerged into the glistening thoroughfare in front of the vast hotels, and I was struck, as I never fail to be, with its futile and unmeaning splendor. I think there is nothing in our dun-colored civilization prettier than that habit the ladies have in Saratoga of going out on the street after dark in their bare heads. When I first saw them wandering about so in the glitter of the shop-windows and the fitful glare of the electrics everywhere, I thought they must be some of those Spanish-Americans mistaking the warm, dry air of the Northern night for that of their own latitudes;

but when I came up with them I could hear, if I could not see, that they were of our own race. Those flat and shapeless tones could come through the noses of no other. The beauty and the elegance were also ours, and the fearless trust of circumstance. They sauntered up and down before the gaunt, high porticos of the hotels, as much at home as they could have been in their own houses, and in much the same dress as if they had been receiving there. The effect is one of incomparable cheer, and is a promise of social brilliancy which Saratoga no more keeps than she does that of her other characteristic aspects: say the forenoon effect of the same thoroughfare, with the piazzas banked with the hotel guests, and the street full of the light equipages which seem peculiar to the place passing and repassing, in the joyous sunlight and out of it, on the leaf-flecked street. Even the public carriages of Saratoga have a fresh, unjaded air; and to issue from the railway station in the midst of those buoyant top-phaëtons and surreys, with their light-limbed horses, is to be thrilled by some such insensate expectation of pleasure as fills the heart of a boy at his first sally into the world. I always expect to find my lost youth waiting for me around the corner of the United States Hotel, and I accuse myself of some fault if it disap-

points me, as it always does. I can imagine what gaudy hopes by day and by night the bright staging of the potential drama must awaken in the breast of a young girl when she first sees it, and how blank she must feel when the curtain goes down and there has been no play. It was a real anguish to me when that young girl with the Deerings welcomed my wife and me with a hopeful smile, as if we were the *dramatis personæ*, and now the performance must be going to begin. I could see how much our chance acquaintance had brightened the perspective for her, and how eagerly she had repaired all her illusions; and I thought how much better it would have been if she had been left to the dull and spiritless resignation in which I had first seen her. From that there could be no fall, at least, and now she had risen from it only to sink again.

But, in fact, the whole party seemed falsely cheered by the event of the afternoon; and in the few moments that we sat with them on their veranda, before going to the music at the Grand Union, I could hear the ladies laughing together, while Deering joyously unfolded to me his plan of going home the next morning, and leaving his wife and Miss Gage behind him. "They will stay in this hotel,—they might as well,—and I

guess they can get along. My wife feels more acquainted since she met Mrs. March, and I sha'n't feel so much like leavin' her among strangers here. I don't know when she's taken such a fancy to any one as she has to your wife, or Miss Gage either. I guess she'll want to ask her about the stores."

I said that I believed the fancy was mutual, and that there was nothing my wife liked better than telling people about stores. I added, in generalization, that when a woman had spent all her own money on dress, it did her quite as much good to see other women spending theirs; and Deering said he guessed that was about so. He gave me a push on the shoulder to make me understand how keenly he appreciated the joke, and I perceived that we had won his heart, too.

We joined the ladies, and I thought that my sufferings for her authorized me to attach myself more especially to Miss Gage, and to find out all I could about her. We walked ahead of the others, and I was aware of her making believe that it was quite the same as if she were going to the music with a young man. Not that she seemed disposed to trifle with my gray hairs; I quickly saw that this would not be in character with her; but some sort of illusion was essential to her youth, and she could not help rejuve-

nating me. This was quite like the goddess she looked, I reflected, but otherwise she was not formidably divine, and, in fact, I suppose the goddesses were, after all, only nice girls at heart. This one, at any rate, I decided, was a very nice girl when she was not sulking; and she was so brightened by her little adventure, which was really no adventure, that I could not believe I had ever seen her sulking.

The hotel people did not keep us from going into the court of the hotel, as I was afraid they might, and we all easily found places. In the pauses of the music I pointed out such notables and characters as I saw about us, and tried to possess her of as much of the Saratoga world as I knew. It was largely there in that bold evidence it loves, and in that social solitude to which the Saratoga of the hotels condemns the denizens of her world. I do not mean that the Saratoga crowd is at all a fast-looking crowd. There are sporting people and gamblers; but the great mass of the frequenters are plain, honest Americans, out upon a holiday from all parts of the country, and of an innocence too inveterate to have grasped the fact that there is no fashion in Saratoga now but the fashion of the ladies' dresses. These, I must say, are of the newest and prettiest; the dressing of the women always strikes

me there. My companion was eager to recognize the splendors which she had heard of, and I pointed out an old lady by the door, who sat there displaying upon her vast person an assortment of gems and jewels which she seemed as personally indifferent to as if she were a show-window, and I was glad to have the girl shrink from the spectacle in a kind of mute alarm. I tried to make her share my pleasure in a group of Cubans—fat father, fat mother, fat daughter—who came down the walk toward us in the halo of tropical tradition; but she had not the taste for olives, and I saw that I failed to persuade her of the æsthetic value of this alien element among us. She apparently could do almost as little with some old figures of bygone beaus spectrally revisiting the hotel haunts of their youth; but she was charmed with the sylvan loveliness of that incomparable court. It is, in fact, a park of the tall, slim Saratoga trees inclosed by the quadrangle of the hotel, exquisitely kept, and with its acres of greensward now showing their color vividly in the light of the electrics, which shone from all sides on the fountain flashing and plashing in the midst. I said that here was that union of the sylvan and the urban which was always the dream of art, and which formed the delicate charm of pastoral poetry; and although

I do not think she quite grasped the notion, I saw that she had a pleasure in the visible fact, and that was much better. Besides, she listened very respectfully, and with no signs of being bored.

In the wait between the two parts of the concert, I invited her to walk around the court with me, and under the approving eye of Mrs. March we made this expedition. It seemed to me that I could not do a wiser thing, both for the satisfaction of my own curiosity and for the gratification of the autobiographical passion we all feel, than to lead her on to speak of herself. But she had little or nothing to say of herself, and what she said of other things was marked by a straightforward good sense, if not a wide intelligence. I think we make a mistake when we suppose that a beautiful woman must always be vain or conscious. I fancy that a beauty is quite as often a solid and sensible person, with no inordinate wish to be worshiped, and this young lady struck me as wholly unspoiled by flattery. I decided that she was not the type that would take the fancy of De Witt Point, and that she had grown up without local attention for that reason, or possibly because a certain coldness in her overawed the free spirit of rustic love-making. No doubt she knew that she was beautiful, and I began to think that it was

not so much disappointment at finding Saratoga as indifferent as De Witt Point which gave her the effect of disgust I had first noted in her the night before. That might rather have come from the sense of feeling herself a helpless burden on her friends, and from that young longing for companionship which is as far as may be from the desire of conquest, of triumph. Finding her now so gratefully content with the poor efforts to amuse her which an old fellow like me could make, I perceived that the society of other girls would suffice to make Saratoga quite another thing for her, and I cast about in my mind to contrive this somehow.

I confess that I liked her better and better, and before the evening was out I had quite transferred my compassion from the Deerings to her. It *was* forlorn and dreary for her to be attached to this good couple, whose interests were primarily in each other, and who had not the first of those arts which could provide her with other company. She willingly told about their journey to Saratoga, and her story did not differ materially from the account Deering had already given me; but even the outward form of adventure had fallen from their experience since they had come to Saratoga. They had formed the habit of Congress Park by accident; but they had not been to the lake, or the

races, or the House of Pansa, or Mount McGregor, or Hilton Park, or even the outlying springs. It was the first time they had been inside of the Grand Union. "Then you have never seen the parlor?" I asked; and after the concert I boldly led the way into the parlor, and lavished its magnificence upon them as if I had been the host, or one of the hotel guests at the very least. I enjoyed the breathlessness of the Deerings so much, as we walked up and down the vast drawing-rooms accompanied by our images in the mirrors, that I insisted upon sitting down with them all upon some of the richest pieces of furniture; and I was so flown with my success as cicerone that I made them come with me to the United States. I showed them through the parlors there, and then led them through to the inner veranda, which commanded another wooded court like that of the Grand Union. I tried to make them feel the statelier sentiment of the older hotel, and to stir their imaginations with a picture of the old times, when the Southern planters used to throng the place, and all that was gay and brilliant in fashionable society was to be seen there some time during the summer. I think that I failed in this, but apparently I succeeded in giving them an evening of dazzling splendor.

"Well, sir, this has been a great treat," said Mr.

Deering, when he bade us good-by as well as good night; he was going early in the morning.

The ladies murmured their gratitude, Mrs. Deering with an emotion that suited her thanks, and Miss Gage with a touch of something daughterly toward me that I thought pretty.

VI.

"Well, what *did* you make of her, my dear?" Mrs. March demanded the instant she was beyond their hearing. "I must say, you didn't spare yourself in the cause; you did bravely. What is she like?"

"Really, I don't know," I answered, after a moment's reflection. "I should say she was almost purely potential. She's not so much this or that kind of girl; she's merely a radiant image of girlhood."

"Now, you're chicquing it, you're faking it," said Mrs. March, borrowing the verbs severally from the art editor and the publisher of "Every Other Week." "You have got to tell me just how much and how little there really is of her before I go any further with them. Is she stupid?"

"No—no; I shouldn't say stupid exactly. She is —what shall I say?—extremely plain-minded. I suppose the goddesses were plain-minded. I'm a little puzzled by her attitude toward her own beauty. She

doesn't live her beauty any more than a poet lives his poetry or a painter his painting; though I've no doubt she knows her gift is hers just as they do."

"I think I understand. You mean she isn't conscious."

"No. Conscious isn't quite the word," I said, fastidiously. "Isn't there some word that says less, or more, in the same direction?"

"No, there isn't; and I shall think you don't mean anything at all if you keep on. Now, tell me how she really impressed you. Does she know anything? Has she read anything? Has she any ideas?"

"Really, I can't say whether they were ideas or not. She knew what 'Every Other Week' was; she had read the stories in it; but I'm not sure she valued it at its true worth. She is very plain-minded."

"Don't keep repeating that! What do you mean by plain-minded?"

"Well, honest, single, common-sense, coherent, arithmetical."

"Horrors! Do you mean that she is *mannish?*"

"No, not mannish. And yet she gave me the notion that, when it came to companionship, she would be just as well satisfied with a lot of girls as young men."

Mrs. March pulled her hand out of my arm, and stopped short under one of those tall Saratoga shade-trees to dramatize her inference. "Then she is the slyest of all possible pusses! Did she give you the notion that she would be just as well satisfied with you as with a young man!"

"She couldn't deceive me so far as *that*, my dear."

"Very well; I shall take her in hand myself to-morrow, and find out what she really is."

Mrs. March went shopping the next forenoon with what was left of the Deering party; Deering had taken the early train north, and she seemed to have found the ladies livelier without him. She formed the impression from their more joyous behavior that he kept his wife from spending as much money as she would naturally have done, and that, while he was not perhaps exactly selfish, he was forgetful of her youth, of the difference in years between them, and of her capacity for pleasures which he could not care for. She said that Mrs. Deering and Miss Gage now acted like two girls together, and, if anything, Miss Gage seemed the elder of the two.

"And what did you decide about her?" I inquired.

"Well, I helped her buy a hat and a jacket at one of those nice shops just below the hotel where they're

stopping, and we've started an evening dress for her. She can't wear that white duck morning, noon, and night."

"But her character—her nature?"

"Oh! Well, she is rather plain-minded, as you call it. I think she shows out her real feelings too much for a woman."

"Why do you prefer dissimulation in your sex, my dear?"

"I don't call it dissimulation. But of course a girl ought to hide her feelings. Don't you think it would have been better for her not to have looked so obviously out of humor when you first saw her the other night?"

"She wouldn't have interested me so much, then, and she probably wouldn't have had your acquaintance now."

"Oh, I don't mean to say that even that kind of girl won't get on, if she gives her mind to it; but I think I should prefer a little less plain-mindedness, as you call it, if I were a man."

I did not know exactly what to say to this, and I let Mrs. March go on.

"It's so in the smallest thing. If you're choosing a thing for her, and she likes another, she lets you feel

it at once. I don't mean that she's rude about it, but she seems to set herself so square across the way, and you come up with a kind of bump against her. I don't think that's very feminine. That's what I mean by mannish. You always know where to find her."

I don't know why this criticism should have amused me so much, but I began to laugh quite uncontrollably, and I laughed on and on. Mrs. March kept her temper with me admirably. When I was quiet again, she said:

"Mrs. Deering is a person that wins your heart at once; she has that *appealing* quality. You can see that she's cowed by her husband, though he means to be kind to her; and yet you may be sure she gets round him, and has her own way all the time. I know it was her idea to have him go home and leave them here, and of course she made him think it was his. She saw that as long as he was here, and anxious to get back to his 'stock,' there was no hope of giving Miss Gage the sort of chance she came for, and so she determined to manage it. At the same time, you can see that she is true as steel, and would abhor anything like deceit worse than the pest."

"I see; and that is why you dislike Miss Gage?"

"Dislike her? No, I don't dislike her; but she is

disappointing. If she were a plain girl her plain-mindedness would be all right; it would be amusing; she would turn it to account and make it seem humorous. But it doesn't seem to go with her beauty; it takes away from that—I don't know how to express it exactly."

"You mean that she has no charm."

"No: I don't mean that at all. She has a great deal of charm of a certain kind, but it's a very peculiar kind. After all, the truth is the truth, Basil, isn't it?"

"It is sometimes, my dear," I assented.

"And the truth has its charm, even when it's too blunt."

"Ah, I'm not so sure of that."

"Yes—yes, it has. You mustn't say so, Basil, or I shall lose all my faith in you. If I couldn't trust you I don't know what I should do."

"What are you after now, Isabel?"

"I am not after anything. I want you to go round to all the hotels and see if there is not some young man you know at one of them. There surely must be."

"Would one young man be enough?"

"If he were attentive enough, he would be. One

young man is as good as a thousand if the girl is the right kind."

"But you have just been implying that Miss Gage is cold and selfish and greedy. Shall I go round exploring hotel registers for a victim to such a divinity as that?"

"No; you needn't go till I have had a talk with her. I am not sure she is worth it; I am not sure that I want to do a single thing for her."

VII.

The next day, after another forenoon's shopping with her friends, Mrs. March announced: "Well, now, it has all come out, Basil, and I wonder you didn't get the secret at once from your Mr. Deering. Have you been supposing that Miss Gage was a poor girl whom the Deerings had done the favor of bringing with them?"

"Why, what of it?" I asked, provisionally.

"She is very well off. Her father is not only the president, as they call it, of the village, but he's the president of the bank."

"Yes; I told you that Deering told me so—"

"But he is very queer. He has kept her very close from the other young people, and Mrs. Deering is the only girl friend she's ever had, and she's grown up without having been anywhere without him. They had to plead with him to let her come with them,—or Mrs. Deering had,—but when he once consented,

he consented handsomely. He gave her a lot of money, and told them he wanted her to have the best time that money could buy; and of course you can understand how such a man would think that money would buy a good time anywhere. But the Deerings didn't know how to go about it. She confessed as much when we were talking the girl over. I could see that she stood in awe of her somehow from the beginning, and that she felt more than the usual responsibility for her. That was the reason she was so eager to get her husband off home; as long as he was with them she would have to work everything through him, and that would be double labor, because he is so hopelessly *villaginous*, don't you know, that he never could rise to the conception of anything else. He took them to a cheap, second-class hotel, and he was afraid to go with them anywhere because he never was sure that it was the right thing to do; and he was too proud to ask, and they had to keep prodding him all the time."

"That's delightful!"

"Oh, I dare say you think so; but if you knew how it wounded a woman's self-respect you would feel differently; or you wouldn't, rather. But now, thank goodness! they've got him off their hands, and they can begin to breathe freely. That is, Mrs. Deering

could, if she hadn't her heart in her mouth all the time, wondering what she can do for the girl, and bullying herself with the notion that she is to blame if she doesn't have a good time. You can understand just how it was with them always. Mrs. Deering is one of those meek little things that a great, splendid, lonely creature like Miss Gage would take to in a small place, and perfectly crush under the weight of her confidence; and she would want to make her husband live up to her ideal of the girl, and would be miserable because he wouldn't or couldn't."

"I believe the good Deering didn't even think her handsome."

"That's it. And he thought anything that was good enough for his wife was good enough for Miss Gage, and he'd be stubborn about doing things on her account, even to please his wife."

"Such conduct is imaginable of the good Deering. I don't think he liked her."

"Nor she him. Mrs. Deering helplessly hinted as much. She said he didn't like to have her worrying so much about Miss Gage's not having a good time, and she couldn't make him feel as she did about it, and she was half glad for his own sake that he had to go home."

"Did she say that?"

"Not exactly; but you could see that she meant it. Do you think it would do for them to change from their hotel, and go to the Grand Union or the States or Congress Hall?"

"Have you been putting them up to that, Isabel?"

"I knew you would suspect me, and I wouldn't have asked for your opinion if I had cared anything for it, really. What would be the harm of their doing it?"

"None whatever, if you really want my worthless opinion. But what could they do there?"

"They could see something if they couldn't do anything, and as soon as Miss Gage has got her new gowns I'm going to tell them you thought they could do it. It was their own idea, at any rate."

"Miss Gage's?"

"Mrs. Deering's. She has the courage of a—I don't know what. She sees that it's a desperate case, and she wouldn't stop at anything."

"Now that her husband has gone home."

"Well, which hotel shall they go to?"

"Oh, that requires reflection."

"Very well, then, when you've reflected I want you to go to the hotel you've chosen, and introduce your-

self to the clerk, and tell him your wife has two friends coming, and you want something very pleasant for them. Tell him all about yourself and 'Every Other Week.'"

"He'll think I want them deadheaded."

"No matter, if your conscience is clear; and don't be so shamefully modest as you always are, but speak up boldly. Now, will you? Promise me you will!"

"I will try, as the good little boy says. But, Isabel, we don't know these people except from their own account."

"And that is quite enough."

"It will be quite enough for the hotel-keeper if they run their board. I shall have to pay it."

"Now, Basil dear, don't be disgusting, and go and do as you're bid."

It was amusing, but it was perfectly safe, and there was no reason why I should not engage rooms for the ladies at another hotel. I had not the least question of them, and I had failed to worry my wife with a pretended doubt. So I decided that I would go up at once and inquire at the Grand Union. I chose this hotel because, though it lacked the fine flower of the more ancient respectability and the legendary charm of the States, it was so spectacular that it would be in

itself a perpetual excitement for those ladies, and would form an effect of society which, with some help from us, might very well deceive them. This was what I said to myself, though in my heart I knew better. Whatever Mrs. Deering might think, that girl was not going to be taken in with any such simple device, and I must count upon the daily chances in the place to afford her the good time she had come for.

As I mounted the steps to the portico of the Grand Union with my head down, and lost in a calculation of these chances, I heard my name gayly called, and I looked up to see young Kendricks, formerly of our staff on "Every Other Week," and still a frequent contributor, and a great favorite of my wife's and my own. My heart gave a great joyful bound at sight of him.

"My dear boy, when in the world did you come?"

"This morning by the steamboat train, and I am never, never going away!"

"You like it, then?"

"Like it! It's the most delightful thing in the universe. Why, I'm simply wild about it, Mr. March. I go round saying to myself, Why have I thrown away my life? Why have I never come to Saratoga before? It's simply supreme, and it's American down to the

ground. Yes; that's what makes it so delightful. No other people could have invented it, and it doesn't try to be anything but what we made it."

"I'm so glad you look at it in that way. *We* like it. We discovered it three or four years ago, and we never let a summer slip, if we can help it, without coming here for a week or a month. The place," I enlarged, "has the charm of ruin, though it's in such obvious repair; it has a past; it's so completely gone by in a society sense. The cottage life here hasn't killed the hotel life, as it has at Newport and Bar Harbor; but the ideal of cottage life everywhere else has made hotel life at Saratoga ungenteel. The hotels are full, but at the same time they are society solitudes."

"How gay it is!" said the young fellow, as he gazed with a pensive smile into the street, where all those festive vehicles were coming and going, dappled by the leaf-shadows from the tall trees overhead. "What air! what a sky!" The one was indeed sparkling, and the other without a cloud, for it had rained in the night, and it seemed as if the weather could never be hot and close again.

I forgot how I had been sweltering about, and said: "Yes; it is a Saratoga day. It's supposed that the sparkle of the air comes from the healthful gases

thrown off by the springs. Some people say the springs are doctored; that's what makes their gases so healthful."

"Why, anything might happen here," Kendricks mused, unheedful of me. "What a scene! what a stage! Why has nobody done a story about Saratoga?" he asked, with a literary turn I knew his thoughts would be taking. All Gerald Kendricks's thoughts were of literature, but sometimes they were not of immediate literary effect, though that was never for long.

"Because," I suggested, "one probably couldn't get his young lady characters to come here if they were at all in society. But of course there must be charming presences here accidentally. Some young girl, say, might come here from a country place, expecting to see social gayety—"

"Ah, but that would be too heart-breaking!"

"Not at all. Not if she met some young fellow accidentally—don't you see?"

"It would be difficult to manage; and hasn't it been done?"

"Everything has been done, my dear fellow. Or, you might suppose a young lady who comes on here with her father, a veteran politician, delegate to the Republican or Democratic convention,—all the conven-

tions meet in Saratoga,—and some ardent young delegate falls in love with her. That would be new ground. There you would have the political novel, which they wonder every now and then some of us don't write." The smile faded from Kendricks's lips, and I laughed. "Well, then, there's nothing for it but the Social Science Congress. Have a brilliant professor win the heart of a lovely sister-in-law of another member by a paper he reads before the Congress. No? You're difficult. Are you stopping here?"

"Yes; are you?"

"I try to give myself the air of it when I am feeling very proud. But really, we live at a most charming little hotel on a back street, out of the whirl and rush that we should prefer to be in if we could afford it." He said it must be delightful, and he made the proper inquiries about Mrs. March. Kendricks never forgot the gentleman in the artist, and he was as true to the *convenances* as if they had been principles. That was what made Mrs. March like his stories so much more than the stories of some people who wrote better. He said he would drop in during the afternoon, and I went indoors on the pretext of buying a newspaper. Then, without engaging rooms for Mrs. Deering and Miss Gage, I hurried home.

VIII.

"Well, did you get the rooms?" asked my wife as soon as she saw me. She did not quite call it across the street to me as I came up from where she sat on the piazza.

"No, I didn't," I said boldly, if somewhat breathlessly.

"Why didn't you? You ought to have gone to the States if they were full at the Grand Union."

"They were not full, unless Kendricks got their last room."

"Do you mean that *he* was there? Mr. Kendricks? If you are hoaxing me, Basil!"

"I am not, my dear; indeed I'm not," said I, beginning to laugh, and this made her doubt me the more.

"Because if you are I shall simply never forgive you. And I'm in earnest this time," she replied.

"Why should I want to hoax you about such a vital

thing as that. Couldn't Kendricks come to Saratoga as well as we? He's here looking up the ground of a story I should think from what he said."

"No matter what he's here for; he's here, and that's enough. I never knew of anything so perfectly providential. Did you *tell* him, Basil? Did you dare?"

"Tell him what?"

"You know; about Miss Gage."

"Well, I came very near it. I dangled the fact before his eyes once, but I caught it away again in time. He never saw it. I thought I'd better let you tell him."

"Is he coming here to see us?"

"He asked if he might."

"He's always nice. I don't know that I shall ask him to do anything for them, after all; I'm not sure that she's worth it. I wish some commoner person had happened along. Kendricks is too precious. I shall have to think about it; and don't you tease me, Basil, will you?"

"I don't know. If I'm not allowed to have any voice in the matter, I'm afraid I shall take it out in teasing. I don't see why Miss Gage isn't quite as good as Kendricks. I believe she's taller, and though he's

pretty good-looking, I prefer her style of beauty. I dare say his family is better, but I fancy she's richer; and his family isn't good beyond New York city, and her money will go anywhere. It's a pretty even thing."

"Good gracious, Basil! you talk as if it were a question of marriage."

"And you *think* it is."

"Now I see that you're *bent* upon teasing, and we won't talk any more, please. What time did he say he would call?"

"If I mayn't talk, I can't tell."

"You may talk that much."

"Well, then, he didn't say."

"Basil," said my wife, after a moment, "if you could be serious, I should like very much to talk with you. I know that you're excited by meeting Mr. Kendricks, and I know what you thought the instant you saw him. But, indeed, it won't do, my dear. It's more than we've any right to ask, and I shall not ask it, and I shall not let you. She is a stiff, awkward village person, and I don't believe she's amiable or intelligent; and to let a graceful, refined, superior man like Mr. Kendricks throw away his time upon her would be wicked, simply wicked. Let those people

manage for themselves from this out. Of course you mustn't get them rooms at the Grand Union now, for he'd be seeing us there with them, and feel bound to pay her attention. You must try for them at the States, since the matter's been spoken of, or at Congress Hall. But there's no hurry. We must have time to think whether we shall use Mr. Kendricks with them. I suppose it will do no harm to introduce him. If he stays we can't very well avoid it; and I confess I should like to see how she impresses him! Of course we shall introduce him! But I insist I shall just do it merely as one human being to another; and don't you come in with any of your romantic nonsense, Basil, about her social disappointment. Just how much did you give the situation away?"

I told as well as I could remember.

"Well, that's nothing. He'll never think of it, and you mustn't hint anything of the kind again."

I promised devoutly, and she went on:

"It wouldn't be nice—it wouldn't be delicate to let him into the conspiracy. That must be entirely our affair, don't you see? And I don't want you to take a single step without me. I don't want you even to discuss her with him. Will you? Because that will tempt you further."

That afternoon Kendricks came promptly to call, like the little gentleman he was, and he was more satisfactory about Saratoga than he had been in the morning even. Mrs. March catechized him, and she didn't leave an emotion of his unsearched by her vivid sympathy. She ended by saying:

"You must write a story about Saratoga. And I have got just the heroine for you."

I started, but she ignored my start.

Kendricks laughed, delighted, and asked, "Is she pretty?"

"Must a heroine be pretty?"

"She had better be. Otherwise she will have to be tremendously clever and say all sorts of brilliant things, and that puts a great burden on the author. If you proclaim boldly at the start that she's a beauty, the illustrator has got to look after her, and the author has a comparative sinecure."

Mrs. March thought a moment, and then she said: "Well, she is a beauty. I don't want to make it too hard for you."

"When shall I see her?" Kendricks demanded, and he feigned an amusing anxiety.

"Well, that depends upon how you behave, Mr. Kendricks. If you are very, very good, perhaps I may

let you see her this evening. We will take you to call upon her."

"Is it possible? Do you mean business? Then she is—in society?"

"*Mr.* Kendricks!" cried Mrs. March, with burlesque severity. "Do you think that I would offer you a heroine who was *not* in society? You forget that I am from Boston!"

"Of course, of course! I understand that any heroine of your acquaintance must be in society. But I thought—I didn't know but for the moment—Saratoga seems to be so tremendously mixed; and Mr. March says there is no society here. But if she is from Boston—"

"I didn't say she was from Boston, Mr. Kendricks."

"Oh, I beg your pardon!"

"She is from De Witt Point," said Mrs. March, and she apparently enjoyed his confusion, no less than my bewilderment at the course she was taking.

I was not going to be left behind, though, and I said: "I discovered this heroine myself, Kendricks, and if there is to be any giving away—"

"Now, Basil!"

"I am going to do it. Mrs. March would never have cared anything about her if it hadn't been for me.

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I can't let her impose on you. This heroine is no more in society than she is from Boston. That is the trouble with her. She has come here for society, and she can't find any."

"Oh, that was what you were hinting at this morning," said Kendricks. "I thought it a pure figment of the imagination."

"One doesn't imagine such things as that, my dear fellow. One imagines a heroine coming here, and having the most magnificent kind of social career,—lawn-parties, lunches, teas, dinners, picnics, hops,—and going back to De Witt Point with a dozen offers of marriage. That's the kind of work the imagination does. But this simple and appealing situation—this beautiful young girl, with her poor little illusions, her secret hopes half hidden from herself, her ignorant past, her visionary future—

"Now, *I* am going to tell you all about her, Mr. Kendricks," Mrs. March broke in upon me, with defiance in her eye; and she flung out the whole fact with a rapidity of utterance that would have left far behind any attempt of mine. But I made no attempt to compete with her; I contented myself with a sarcastic silence which I could see daunted her a little at last.

"And all that we've done, my dear fellow,"—I took

in irony the word she left to me,—"is to load ourselves up with these two impossible people, to go their security to destiny, and answer for their having a good time. We're in luck."

"Why, I don't know," said Kendricks, and I could see that his fancy was beginning to play with the situation; "I don't see why it isn't a charming scheme."

"Of course it is," cried Mrs. March, taking a little heart from his courage.

"We can't make out yet whether the girl is interesting," I put in maliciously.

"That is what *you* say," said my wife. "She is very shy, and of course she wouldn't show out her real nature to you. I found her *very* interesting."

"Now, Isabel!" I protested.

"She is fascinating," the perverse woman persisted. "She has a fascinating dullness."

Kendricks laughed and I jeered at this complex characterization.

"You make me impatient to judge for myself," he said.

"Will you go with me to call upon them this evening?" asked Mrs. March.

"I shall be delighted. And you can count upon me to aid and abet you in your generous conspiracy,

Mrs. March, to the best of my ability. There's nothing I should like better than to help you—"

"Throw 'dust in her beautiful eyes,'" I quoted.

"Not at all," said my wife. "But to spread a beatific haze over everything, so that as long as she stays in Saratoga she shall see life rose-color. Of course you may say that it's a kind of deception—"

"Not at all!" cried the young fellow in his turn. "We will make it reality. Then there will be no harm in it."

"What a jesuitical casuist! You had better read what Cardinal Newman says in his 'Apologia' about lying, young man."

Neither of them minded me, for just then there was a stir of drapery round the corner of the piazza from where we were sitting, and the next moment Mrs. Deering and Miss Gage showed themselves.

"We were just talking of you," said Mrs. March. "May I present our friend Mr. Kendricks, Mrs. Deering? And Miss Gage?"

At sight of the young man, so well dressed and good-looking, who bowed so prettily to her, and then bustled to place chairs for them, a certain cloud seemed to lift from Miss Gage's beautiful face, and to be at least partly broken on Mrs. Deering's visage. I began

to talk to the girl, and she answered in good spirits, and with more apparent interest in my conversation than she had yet shown, while Kendricks very properly devoted himself to the other ladies. Both his eyes were on them, but I felt that he had a third somehow upon her, and that the smallest fact of her beauty and grace was not lost upon him. I knew that her rich, tender voice was doing its work, too, through the commonplaces she vouchsafed to me. There was a moment when I saw him lift a questioning eyebrow upon Mrs. March, and saw her answer with a fleeting frown of affirmation. I cannot tell just how it was that, before he left us, his chair was on the other side of Miss Gage's, and I was eliminated from the dialogue.

He did not stay too long. There was another tableau of him on foot, taking leave of Mrs. March, with a high hand-shake, which had then lately come in, and which I saw the girl note, and then bowing to her and to Mrs. Deering.

"Don't forget," my wife called after him, with a ready invention not lost on his quick intelligence, "that you're going to the concert with us after tea. Eight o'clock, remember."

"You may be sure I shall remember *that*," he returned gayly.

IX.

The countenances of the ladies fell instantly when he was gone. "Mrs. March," said Mrs. Deering, with a nervous tremor, "did Mr. March get us those rooms at the Grand Union?"

"No—no," my wife began, and she made a little pause, as if to gather plausibility. "The Grand Union was very full, and he thought that at the States—"

"Because," said Mrs. Deering, "I don't know as we shall trouble him, after all. Mr. Deering isn't very well, and I guess we have got to go home—"

"*Go home!*" Mrs. March echoed, and her voice was a tone-scene of a toppling hope and a wide-spread desolation. "Why, you mustn't!"

"We must, I guess. It had begun to be very pleasant, and—I guess I have got to go. I can't feel easy about him."

"Why, of course," Mrs. March now assented, and she waved her fan thoughtfully before her face. I

knew what she was thinking of, and I looked at Miss Gage, who had involuntarily taken the pose and expression of the moment when I first saw her at the kiosk in Congress Park. "And Miss Gage?"

"Oh, yes; I must go, too," said the girl, wistfully, forlornly. She had tears in her voice, tears of despair and vexation, I should have said.

"That's too bad," said Mrs. March, and, as she did not offer any solution of the matter, I thought it rather heartless of her to go on and rub it in. "And we were just planning some things we could do together."

"It can't be helped now," returned the girl.

"But we shall see you again before you go?" Mrs. March asked of both.

"Well, I don't know," said the girl, with a look at Mrs. Deering, who now said:

"I guess so. We'll let you know when we're going." And they got away rather stiffly.

"Why in the world, my dear," I asked, "if you weren't going to promote their stay, need you prolong the agony of their acquaintance?"

"Did you feel that about it, too? Well, I wanted to ask you first if you thought it would do."

"What do?"

"You know; get her a room here. Because if we

do we shall have her literally on our hands as long as we are here. We shall have to have the whole care and responsibility of her, and I wanted you to feel just what you were going in for. You know very well I can't do things by halves, and that if I undertake to chaperon this girl I shall chaperon her—"

"To the bitter end. Yes; I understand the conditions of your uncompromising conscience. But I don't believe it will be any such killing matter. There are other semi-detached girls in the house; she could go round with them."

We talked on, and, as sometimes happens, we convinced each other so thoroughly that she came to my ground and I went to hers. Then it was easier for us to come together, and after making me go to the clerk and find out that he had a vacant room, Mrs. March agreed with me that it would not do at all to have Miss Gage stay with us; the fact that there was a vacant room seemed to settle the question.

We were still congratulating ourselves on our escape when Mrs. Deering suddenly reappeared round our corner of the veranda. She was alone, and she looked excited.

"Oh, it isn't anything," she said in answer to the alarm that showed itself in Mrs. March's face at sight

of her. "I hope you won't think it's too presuming, Mrs. March, and I want you to believe that it's something I have thought of by myself, and that Julia wouldn't have let me come if she had dreamed of such a thing. I do hate so to take her back with me, now that she's begun to have a good time, and I was wondering—wondering whether it would be asking too much if I tried to get her a room here. I shouldn't exactly like to leave her in the hotel alone, though I suppose it would be perfectly proper; but Mr. Deering found out when he was trying to get rooms before that there were some young ladies staying by themselves here, and I didn't want to ask the clerk for a room unless you felt just right about it."

"Why, of course, Mrs. Deering. It's a public house, like any other, and you have as much right—"

"But I didn't want you to think that I would do it without asking you, and if it is going to be the least bit of trouble to you—" The poor thing while she talked stood leaning anxiously over toward Mrs. March, who had risen, and pressing the points of her fingers nervously together.

"It won't, Mrs. Deering. It will be nothing but pleasure. Why, certainly. I shall be delighted to have Miss Gage here, and anything that Mr. March

and I can do— Why, we had just been talking of it, and Mr. March has this minute got back from seeing the clerk, and she can have a very nice room. We had been intending to speak to you about it as soon as we saw you."

I do not know whether this was quite true or not, but I was glad Mrs. March said it, from the effect it had upon Mrs. Deering. Tears of relief came into her eyes, and she said: "Then I can go home in the morning. I was going to stay on a day or two longer, on Julia's account, but I didn't feel just right about Mr. Deering, and now I won't have to."

There followed a flutter of polite offers and refusals, acknowledgments and disavowals, and an understanding that I would arrange it all, and that we would come to Mrs. Deering's hotel after supper and see Miss Gage about the when and the how of her coming to us.

"Well, Isabel," I said, after it was all over, and Mrs. Deering had vanished in a mist of happy tears, "I suppose this is what you call perfectly providential. Do you really believe that Miss Gage didn't send her back?"

"I know she didn't. But I know that she *had* to do it just the same as if Miss Gage had driven her at the point of the bayonet."

I laughed at this tragical image. "Can she be such a terror?"

"She is an ideal. And Mrs. Deering is as afraid as death of her. Of course she has to live up to her. It's probably been the struggle of her life, and I can quite imagine her letting her husband die before she would take Miss Gage back unless she went back satisfied."

"I don't believe I can imagine so much as that exactly, but I can imagine her being afraid of Miss Gage's taking it out of her somehow. Now she will take it out of us. I hope you realize that you've done it now, my dear. To be sure, you will have all your life to repent of your rashness."

"I shall never repent," Mrs. March retorted hardily. "It was the right thing, the only thing. We couldn't have let that poor creature stay on, when she was so anxious to get back to her husband."

"No."

"And I confess, Basil, that I feel a little pity for that poor girl, too. It would have been cruel, it would have been fairly wicked, to let her go home so soon, and especially now."

"Oh! And I suppose that by *especially now*, you mean Kendricks," I said, and I laughed mockingly, as

the novelists say. "How sick I am of this stale old love-business between young people! We ought to know better—we're old enough; at least *you* are."

She seemed not to feel the gibe. "Why, Basil," she asked dreamily, "haven't you any romance left in you?"

"Romance? Bah! It's the most ridiculous unreality in the world. If you had so much sympathy for that stupid girl, in her disappointment, why hadn't you a little for that poor woman in her anxiety about her sick husband? But a husband is nothing—when you have got him."

"I did sympathize with her."

"You didn't say so."

"Well, she is only his second wife, and I don't suppose it's anything serious. Didn't I really say anything to her?"

"Not a word. It is curious," I went on, "how we let this idiotic love-passion absorb us to the very last. It is wholly unimportant who marries who, or whether anybody marries at all. And yet we no sooner have the making of a love-affair within reach than we revert to the folly of our own youth, and abandon ourselves to it as if it were one of the great interests of life."

"Who is talking about love? It isn't a question of

that. It's a question of making a girl have a pleasant time for a few days; and what is the harm of it? Girls have a dull enough time at the very best. My heart aches for them, and I shall never let a chance slip to help them, I don't care what you say."

"Now, Isabel," I returned, "don't you be a humbug. This is a perfectly plain case, and you are going in for a very risky affair with your eyes open. You shall not pretend you're not."

"Very well, then, if I am going into it with my eyes open, I shall look out that nothing happens."

"And you think prevision will avail! I wish," I said, "that instead of coming home that night and telling you about this girl, I had confined my sentimentalizing to that young French-Canadian mother, and her dirty little boy who ate the pea-nut shells. I've no doubt it was really a more tragical case. They looked dreadfully poor and squalid. Why couldn't I have amused my idle fancy with their fortunes—the sort of husband and father they had, their shabby home, the struggle of their life? That is the appeal that a genuine person listens to. Nothing does more to stamp me a *poseur* than the fact that I preferred to bemoan myself for a sulky girl who seemed not to be having a good time."

There was truth in my joking, but the truth did not save me; it lost me rather. "Yes," said my wife; "it was your fault. I should never have seen anything in her if it had not been for you. It was your coming back and working me up about her that began the whole thing, and now if anything goes wrong you will have yourself to thank for it."

She seized the opportunity of my having jestingly taken up this load to buckle it on me tight and fast, clasping it here, tying it there, and giving a final pull to the knots that left me scarcely the power to draw my breath, much less the breath to protest. I was forced to hear her say again that all her concern from the beginning was for Mrs. Deering, and that now, if she had offered to do something for Miss Gage, it was not because she cared anything for her, but because she cared everything for Mrs. Deering, who could never lift up her head again at De Witt Point if she went back so completely defeated in all the purposes she had in asking Miss Gage to come with her to Saratoga.

I did not observe that this wave of compassion carried Mrs. March so far as to leave her stranded with Mrs. Deering that evening when we called with Kendricks, and asked her and Miss Gage to go with us to the Congress Park concert. Mrs. Deering said that

she had to pack, that she did not feel just exactly like going; and my tender heart ached with a knowledge of her distress. Miss Gage made a faint, false pretense of refusing to come with us, too; but Mrs. Deering urged her to go, and put on the new dress, which had just come home, so that Mrs. March could see it. The girl came back looking radiant, divine, and—"Will it do?" she palpitated under my wife's critical glance.

"Do? It will *out*do! I never saw anything like it!" The connoisseur patted it a little this way and a little that. "It is a dream! Did the hat come, too?"

It appeared that the hat had come, too. Miss Gage rematerialized with it on, after a moment's evanescence, and looked at my wife with the expression of being something impersonal with a hat on.

"Simply, there is nothing to say!" cried Mrs. March. The girl put up her hands to it. "Good gracious! You mustn't take it off! Your costume is perfect for the concert."

"Is it, really?" asked the girl, joyfully; and she seemed to find this the first fitting moment to say, for sole recognition of our self-sacrifice, "I'm much obliged to you, Mr. March, for getting me that room."

I begged her not to speak of it, and turned an ironical eye upon my wife; but she was lost in admiration of the hat.

"Yes," she sighed; "it's much better than the one I wanted you to get at first." And she afterward explained that the girl seemed to have a perfect instinct for what went with her style.

Kendricks kept himself discreetly in the background, and, with his unfailing right feeling, was talking to Mrs. Deering, in spite of her not paying much attention to him. I must own that I too was absorbed in the spectacle of Miss Gage.

She went off with us, and did not say another word to Mrs. Deering about helping her pack. Perhaps this was best, though it seemed heartless; it may not have been so heartless as it seemed. I dare say it would have been more suffering to the woman if the girl had missed this chance.

X.

We had undertaken rather a queer affair, but it was not so queer after all, when Miss Gage was fairly settled with us. There were other young girls in that pleasant house who had only one another's protection and the general safety of the social atmosphere. We could not conceal from ourselves, of course, that we had done a rather romantic thing, and, in the light of Europe, which we had more or less upon our actions, rather an absurd thing; but it was a comfort to find that Miss Gage thought it neither romantic nor absurd. She took the affair with an apparent ignorance of anything unusual in it—with so much ignorance, indeed, that Mrs. March had her occasional question whether she was duly impressed with what was being done for her. Whether this was so or not, it is certain that she was as docile and as biddable as need be. She did not always ask what she should do; that would not have been in the tradition of village independence;

but she always did what she was told, and did not vary from her instructions a hair's-breadth. I do not suppose she always knew why she might do this and might not do that; and I do not suppose that young girls often understand the reasons of the proprieties. They are told that they must, and that they must not, and this in an astonishing degree suffices them if they are nice girls.

Of course there was pretty constant question of Kendricks in the management of Miss Gage's amusement, for that was really what our enterprise resolved itself into. He showed from the first the sweetest disposition to forward all our plans in regard to her, and, in fact, he even anticipated our wishes. I do not mean to give the notion that he behaved from an interested motive in going to the station the morning Mrs. Deering left, and getting her ticket for her, and checking her baggage, and posting her in the changes she would have to make. This was something I ought to have thought of myself, but I did not think of it, and I am willing that he should have all the credit. I know that he did it out of the lovely generosity of nature which always took me in him. Miss Gage was there with her, and she remained to be consoled after Mrs. Deering departed. They came straight to us

from the train, and then, when he had consigned Miss Gage to Mrs. March's care, he offered to go and see that her things were transferred from her hotel to ours; they were all ready, she said, and the bill was paid.

He did not come back that day, and, in fact, he delicately waited for some sign from us that his help was wanted. But when he did come he had formulated Saratoga very completely, and had a better conception of doing it than I had, after my repeated sojourns.

We went very early in our explorations to the House of Pansa, which you find in very much better repair at Saratoga than you do at Pompeii, and we contrived to pass a whole afternoon there. My wife and I had been there before more than once; but it always pleasantly recalled our wander-years, when we first met in Europe, and we suffered round after those young things with a patience which I hope will not be forgotten at the day of judgment. When we came to a seat we sat down, and let them go off by themselves; but my recollection is that there is not much furniture in the House of Pansa that you can sit down on, and for the most part we all kept together.

Kendricks and I thought alike about the Pompeian

house as a model of something that might be done in the way of a seaside cottage in our own country, and we talked up a little paper that might be done for "Every Other Week," with pretty architectural drawings, giving an account of our imaginary realization of the notion.

"Have somebody," he said, "visit people who had been boring him to come down, or up, or out, and see them, and find them in a Pompeian house, with the sea in front and a blue-green grove of low pines behind. Might have a thread of story, but mostly talk about how they came to do it, and how delightfully livable they found it. You could work it up with some architect, who would help you to 'keep off the grass' in the way of technical blunders. With all this tendency to the classic in public architecture, I don't see why the Pompeian villa shouldn't be the next word for summer cottages."

"Well, we'll see what Fulkerson says. He may see an ad. in it. Would you like to do it?"

"Why not do it yourself? Nobody else could do it so well."

"Thanks for the taffy; but the idea was yours."

"I'll do it," said Kendricks after a moment, "if you won't."

"We'll see."

Miss Gage stared, and Mrs. March said:

"I didn't suppose the House of Pansa would lead to shop with you two."

"You never can tell which way copy lies," I returned; and I asked the girl, "What should *you* think, Miss Gage, of a little paper with a thread of story, but mostly talk, on a supposititious Pompeian cottage?"

"I don't believe I understand," said she, far too remote from our literary interests, as I saw, to be ashamed of her ignorance.

"There!" I said to Kendricks. "Do you think the general public would?"

"Miss Gage isn't the general public," said my wife, who had followed the course of my thought; her tone implied that Miss Gage was wiser and better.

"Would you allow yourself to be drawn," I asked, "dreamily issuing from an aisle of the pine grove as the tutelary goddess of a Pompeian cottage?"

The girl cast a bewildered glance at my wife, who said, "You needn't pay any attention to him, Miss Gage. He has an idea that he is making a joke."

We felt that we had done enough for one afternoon, when we had done the House of Pansa, and I proposed that we should go and sit down in Congress

Park and listen to the Troy band. I was not without the hope that it would play "Washington Post."

My wife contrived that we should fall in behind the young people as we went, and she asked, "What *do* you suppose she made of it all?"

"Probably she thought it was the house of Sancho Panza."

"No; she hasn't read enough to be so ignorant even as that. It's astonishing how much she doesn't know. What can her home life have been like?"

"Philistine to the last degree. We people who are near to literature have no conception how far from it most people are. The immense majority of 'homes,' as the newspapers call them, have no books in them except the Bible and a semi-religious volume or two—things you never see out of such 'homes'—and the State business directory. I was astonished when it came out that she knew about 'Every Other Week.' It must have been by accident. The sordidness of her home life must be something unimaginable. The daughter of a village capitalist, who's put together his money dollar by dollar, as they do in such places, from the necessities and follies of his neighbors, and has half the farmers of the region by the throat through his mortgages—I don't think that she's 'one to be

desired' any more than 'the daughter of a hundred earls,' if so much."

"She doesn't seem sordid herself."

"Oh, the taint doesn't show itself at once:

> "'If nature put not forth her power
> About the opening of the flower,
> Who is it that would live an hour?'

and she *is* a flower, beautiful, exquisite."

"Yes, and she had a mother as well as this father of hers. Why shouldn't she be like her mother?"

I laughed. "That is true! I wonder why we always leave the mother out of the count when we sum up the hereditary tendencies? I suppose the mother is as much a parent as the father."

"Quite. And there is no reason why this girl shouldn't have her mother's nature."

"We don't actually *know* anything against her father's nature yet," I suggested; "but if her mother lived a starved and stunted life with him, it may account for that effect of disappointed greed which I fancied in her when I first saw her."

"I don't call it greed in a young girl to want to see something of the world."

"What do you call it?"

Kendricks and the girl were stopping at the gate of

the pavilion, and looking round at us. "Ah, he's got enough for one day! He's going to leave her to us now."

When we came up he said, "I'm going to run off a moment; I'm going up to the book-store there," and he pointed toward one that had spread across the sidewalk just below the Congress Hall veranda, with banks and shelves of novels, and a cry of bargains in them on signs sticking up from their rows. "I want to see if they have the 'Last Days of Pompeii.'"

"We will find the ladies inside the park," I said. "I will go with you—"

"Mr. March wants to see if they have the last number of 'Every Other Week,'" my wife mocked after us. This was, indeed, commonly a foible of mine. I had newly become one of the owners of the periodical as well as the editor, and I was all the time looking out for it at the news-stands and book-stores, and judging their enterprise by its presence or absence. But this time I had another motive, though I did not allege it.

"I suppose it's for Miss Gage?" I ventured to say, by way of prefacing what I wished to say. "Kendricks, I'm afraid we're abusing your good nature. I know you're up here to look about, and you're letting

us use all your time. You mustn't do it. Women have no conscience about these things, and you can't expect a woman who has a young lady on her hands to spare you. I give you the hint. Don't count upon Mrs. March in this matter."

"Oh, I think you are very good to allow me to bother round," said the young fellow, with that indefatigable politeness of his. He added vaguely, "It's very interesting."

"Seeing it through such a fresh mind?" I suggested. "Well, I'll own that I don't think you could have found a much fresher one. Has she read the 'Last Days of Pompeii?'"

"She thought she had at first, but it was the 'Fall of Granada.'"

"How delightful! Don't you wish we could read books with that utterly unliterary sense of them?"

"Don't you think women generally do?" he asked evasively.

"I dare say they do at De Witt Point."

He did not answer; I saw that he was not willing to talk the young lady over, and I could not help praising his taste to myself at the cost of my own. His delicacy forbade him the indulgence which my own protested against in vain. He showed his taste

again in buying a cheap copy of the book, which he meant to give her, and of course he had to be all the more attentive to her because of my deprecating his self-devotion.

XI.

In the intimacy that grew up between my wife and Miss Gage I found myself less and less included. It seemed to me at times that I might have gone away from Saratoga and not been seriously missed by any one, but perhaps this was not taking sufficient account of my value as a spectator, by whom Mrs. March could verify her own impressions.

The girl had never known a mother's care, and it was affecting to see how willing she was to be mothered by the chance kindness of a stranger. She probably felt more and more her ignorance of the world as it unfolded itself to her in terms so altogether strange to the life of De Witt Point. I was not sure that she would have been so grateful for the efforts made for her enjoyment if they had failed, but as the case stood she was certainly grateful; my wife said that, and I saw it. She seemed to have written home about us to her father, for she read my wife part of a letter from him conveying his "respects," and asking her to thank

us for him. She came to me with the check it enclosed, and asked me to get it cashed for her; it was for a handsome amount. But she continued to go about at our cost, quite unconsciously, till one day she happened to witness a contest of civility between Kendricks and myself as to which should pay the carriage we were dismissing. That night she came to Mrs. March, and, with many blushes, asked to be allowed to pay for the past and future her full share of the expense of our joint pleasures. She said that she had never thought of it before, and she felt so much ashamed. She could not be consoled till she was promised that she should be indulged for the future, and that I should be obliged to average the outlay already made and let her pay a fourth. When she had gained her point, Mrs. March said that she seemed a little scared, and said, "I haven't offended you, Mrs. March, have I? Because if it isn't right for me to pay—"

"It's quite right, my dear," said my wife, "and it's very nice of you to think of it."

"You know," the girl explained, "I've never been out a great deal at home even; and it's always the custom there for the gentlemen to pay for a ride—or dance—or anything; but this is different."

Mrs. March said "Yes," and, in the interest of civilization, she did a little missionary work. She told her that in Boston the young ladies paid for their tickets to the Harvard assemblies, and preferred to do it, because it left them without even a tacit obligation.

Miss Gage said she had never heard of such a thing before, but she could see how much better it was.

I do not think she got on with the "Last Days of Pompeii" very rapidly; its immediate interest was superseded by other things. But she always had the book about with her, and I fancied that she tried to read it in those moments of relaxation from our pleasuring when she might better have been day-dreaming, though I dare say she did enough of that too.

What amused me in the affair was the celerity with which it took itself out of our hands. In an incredibly short time we had no longer the trouble of thinking what we should do for Miss Gage; that was provided for by the forethought of Kendricks, and our concern was how each could make the other go with the young people on their excursions and expeditions. We had seen and done all the things that they were doing, and it presently bored us to chaperon them. After a good deal of talking we arrived at a rough division of duty, and I went with them walking and eating and drink-

ing, and for anything involving late hours, and Mrs. March presided at such things as carriage exercise, concerts and shopping.

There are not many public entertainments at Saratoga, except such as the hotels supply; but a series of Salvation Army meetings did duty as amusements, and there was one theatrical performance—a performance of "East Lynne" entirely by people of color. The sentiments and incidents of the heart-breaking melodrama, as the colored mind interpreted them, were of very curious effect. It was as if the version were dyed with the same pigment that darkened the players' skins: it all came out negro. Yet they had tried to make it white; I could perceive how they aimed not at the imitation of our nature, but at the imitation of our convention; it was like the play of children in that. I should have said that nothing could be more false than the motives and emotions of the drama as the author imagined them, but I had to own that their rendition by these sincere souls was yet more artificial. There was nothing traditional, nothing archaic, nothing autochthonic in their poor art. If the scene could at any moment have resolved itself into a walk-round, with an interspersion of spirituals, it would have had the charm of these; it would have consoled and edified;

but as it was I have seldom been so bored. I began to make some sad reflections, as that our American society, in its endeavor for the effect of European society, was of no truer ideal than these colored comedians, and I accused myself of a final absurdity in having come there with these young people, who, according to our good native usage, could have come perfectly well without me. At the end of the first act I broke into their talk with my conclusion that we must not count the histrionic talent among the gifts of the African race just yet. We could concede them music, I supposed, and there seemed to be hope for them, from what they had some of them done, in the region of the plastic arts; but apparently the stage was not for them, and this was all the stranger because they were so imitative. Perhaps, I said, it was an excess of self-consciousness which prevented their giving themselves wholly to the art, and I began to speak of the subjective and the objective, of the real and the ideal; and whether it was that I became unintelligible as I became metaphysical, I found Kendricks obviously not following me in the incoherent replies he gave. Miss Gage had honestly made no attempt to follow me. He asked, Why, didn't I think it was pretty well done? They had enjoyed it very much, he said. I could only

stare in answer, and wonder what had become of the man's tastes or his principles; he was either humbugging himself or he was humbugging me. After that I left them alone, and suffered through the rest of the play with what relief I could get from laughing when the pathetic emotions of the drama became too poignant. I decided that Kendricks was absorbed in the study of his companion's mind, which must be open to his contemporaneous eye as it could never have been to my old-sighted glasses, and I envied him the knowledge he was gaining of that type of American girl. It suddenly came to me that he must be finding his account in this, and I felt a little less regret for the waste of civilities, of attentions, which sometimes seemed to me beyond her appreciation.

I, for my part, gave myself to the study of the types about me, and I dwelt long and luxuriously upon the vision of a florid and massive matron in diaphanous evening dress, whom I imagined to be revisiting the glimpses of her girlhood in the ancient watering-place, and to be getting all the gayety she could out of it. These are the figures one mostly sees at Saratoga; there is very little youth of the present day there, but the youth of the past abounds, with the belated yellow hair and the purple mustaches, which

gave a notion of greater wickedness in a former generation.

I made my observation that the dress, even in extreme cases of elderly prime, was very good—in the case of the women, I mean; the men there, as everywhere with us, were mostly slovens; and I was glad to find that the good taste and the correct fashion were without a color-line; there were some mulatto ladies present as stylish as their white sisters, or stepsisters.

The most amiable of the human race is in great force at Saratoga, where the vast hotel service is wholly in its hands, and it had honored the effort of the comedians that night with a full house of their own complexion. We who were not of it showed strangely enough in the dark mass, who let us lead the applause, however, as if doubtful themselves where it ought to come in, and whom I found willing even to share some misplaced laughter of mine. They formed two thirds of the audience on the floor, and they were a cloud in the gallery, scarcely broken by a gleam of white.

I entertained myself with them a good deal, and I thought how much more delightful they were in their own kindly character than in their assumption of white character, and I tried to define my suffering from the

performance as an effect from my tormented sympathies rather than from my offended tastes. When the long stress was over, and we rose and stood to let the crowd get out, I asked Miss Gage if she did not think this must be the case. I do not suppose she was really much more experienced in the theatre than the people on the stage, some of whom I doubted to have ever seen a play till they took part in "East Lynne." But I thought I would ask her that in order to hear what she would say; and she said very simply that she had seen so few plays she did not know what to think of it, and I could see that she was abashed by the fact. Kendricks must have seen it too, for he began at once to save her from herself, with all his subtle generosity, and to turn her shame to praise. My heart, which remained sufficiently cold to her, warmed more than ever to him, and I should have liked to tell her that here was the finest and rarest human porcelain using itself like common clay in her behalf, and to demand whether she thought she was worth it.

I did not think she was, and I had a lurid moment when I was tempted to push on and make her show herself somehow at her worst. We had undertaken a preposterous thing in befriending her as we had done, and our course in bringing Kendricks in was wholly

unjustifiable. How could I lead her on to some betrayal of her essential Philistinism, and make her so impossible in his eyes that even he, with all his sweetness and goodness, must take the first train from Saratoga in the morning?

We had of course joined the crowd in pushing forward; people always do, though they promise themselves to wait till the last one is out. I got caught in a dark eddy on the first stair-landing; but I could see them farther down, and I knew they would wait for me outside the door.

When I reached it at last they were nowhere to be seen; I looked up this street and down that, but they were not in sight.

XII.

I DID not afflict myself very much, nor pretend to do so. They knew the way home, and after I had blundered about in search of them through the lamp-shot darkness, I settled myself to walk back at my leisure, comfortably sure that I should find them on the veranda waiting for me when I reached the hotel. It was quite a thick night, and I almost ran into a couple at a corner of our quieter street when I had got to it out of Broadway. They seemed to be standing and looking about, and when the man said, "He must have thought we took the first turn," and the woman, "Yes, that must have been the way," I recognized my estrays.

I thought I would not discover myself to them, but follow on, and surprise them by arriving at our steps at the same moment they did, and I prepared myself to hurry after them. But they seemed in no hurry, and I had even some difficulty in accommodating my pace to the slowness of theirs.

"Won't you take my arm, Miss Gage?" he asked as they moved on.

"It's so *very* dark," she answered, and I knew she had taken it. "I can hardly see a step, and poor Mr. March, with his glasses—I don't know what he'll do."

"Oh, he only uses them to read with; he can see as well as we can in the dark."

"He's very young in his feelings," said the girl; "he puts me in mind of my own father."

"He's very young in his thoughts," said Kendricks; "and that's much more to the purpose for a magazine editor. There are very few men of his age who keep in touch with the times as he does."

"Still, Mrs. March seems a good deal younger, don't you think? I wonder how soon they begin to feel old?"

"Oh, not till along in the forties, I should say. It's a good deal in temperament. I don't suppose that either of them realizes yet that they're old, and they must be nearly fifty."

"How strange it must be," said the girl, "to be fifty years old! Twenty seems old enough, goodness knows."

"How should you like to be a dotard of twenty-seven?" Kendricks asked, and she laughed at his joke.

"I don't suppose I should mind it so much if I were a man."

I had promised myself that if the talk became at all confidential I would drop behind out of ear-shot; but though it was curiously intimate for me to be put apart in the minds of these young people on account of my years as not of the same race or fate as themselves, there was nothing in what they said that I might not innocently overhear, as far as they were concerned, and I listened on.

But they had apparently given me quite enough attention. After some mutual laughter at what she said last, they were silent a moment, and then he said soberly, "There's something fine in this isolation the dark gives you, isn't there? You're as remote in it from our own time and place as if you were wandering in interplanetary space."

"I suppose we *are* doing that all the time—on the earth," she suggested.

"Yes; but how hard it is to realize that we are on the earth now. Sometimes I have a sense of it, though, when the moon breaks from one flying cloud to another. Then it seems as if I were a passenger on some vast, shapeless ship sailing through the air. What," he asked, with no relevancy that I could perceive,

"was the strangest feeling *you* ever had?" I remembered asking girls such questions when I was young, and their not apparently thinking it at all odd.

"I don't know," she returned thoughtfully. "There was one time when I was little, and it had sleeted, and the sun came out just before it set, and seemed to set all the woods on fire. I thought the world was burning up."

"It must have been very weird," said Kendricks; and I thought, "Oh, good heavens! Has he got to talking of weird things?"

"It's strange," he added, "how we all have that belief when we are children that the world is going to burn up! I don't suppose any child escapes it. Do you remember that poem of Thompson's—the 'City of Dreadful Night' man—where he describes the end of the world?"

"No, I never read it."

"Well, merely, he says when the conflagration began the little flames looked like crocuses breaking through the sod. If it ever happened I fancy it would be quite as simple as that. But perhaps you don't like gloomy poetry?"

"Yes, yes, I do. It's the only kind that I care about."

II

"Then you hate funny poetry?"

"I think it's disgusting. Papa is always cutting it out of the papers and wanting to send it to me, and we have the greatest *times!*"

"I suppose," said Kendricks, "it expresses some moods, though."

"Oh, yes; it expresses some moods; and sometimes it makes me laugh in spite of myself, and ashamed of anything serious."

"That's always the effect of a farce with me."

"But then I'm ashamed of being ashamed afterward," said the girl. "I suppose you go to the theatre a great deal in New York."

"It's a school of life," said Kendricks. "I mean the audience."

"I would like to go to the opera once. I am going to make papa take me in the winter." She laughed with a gay sense of power, and he said:

"You seem to be great friends with your father."

"Yes, we're always together. I always went everywhere with him; this is the first time I've been away without him. But I thought I'd come with Mrs. Deering and see what Saratoga was like; I had never been here."

"And is it like what you thought?"

"No. The first week we didn't do anything. Then we got acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. March, and I began to really see something. But I supposed it was all balls and gayety."

"We must get up a few if you're so fond of them," Kendricks playfully suggested.

"Oh, I don't know as I am. I never went much at home. Papa didn't care to have me."

"Ah, do you think it was right for him to keep you all to himself?" The girl did not answer, and they had both halted so abruptly that I almost ran into them. "I don't quite make out where we are." Kendricks seemed to be peering about. I plunged across the street lest he should ask me. I heard him add, "Oh, yes; I know now," and then they pressed forward.

We were quite near our hotel, but I thought it best to walk round the square and let them arrive first. On the way I amused myself thinking how different the girl had shown herself to him from what she had ever shown herself to my wife or me. She had really, this plain-minded goddess, a vein of poetic feeling, some inner beauty of soul answering to the outer beauty of body. She had a romantic attachment to her father, and this shed a sort of light on both of them, though I knew that it was not always a revelation of character.

XIII.

When I reached the hotel I found Miss Gage at the door, and Kendricks coming out of the office toward her.

"Oh, here he is!" she called to him at sight of me.

"Where in the world have you been?" he demanded. "I had just found out from the clerk that you hadn't come in yet, and I was going back for you with a search-light."

"Oh, I wasn't so badly lost as all that," I returned. "I missed you in the crowd at the door, but I knew you'd get home somehow, and so I came on without you. But my aged steps are not so quick as yours."

The words, mechanically uttered, suggested something, and I thought that if they were in for weirdness I would give them as much weirdness as they could ask for. "When you get along toward fifty you'll find that the foot you've still got out of the grave doesn't work so lively as it used. Besides, I was in-

terested in the night effect. It's so gloriously dark; and I had a fine sense of isolation as I came along, as if I were altogether out of my epoch and my environment. I felt as if the earth was a sort of *Flying Dutchman*, and I was the only passenger. It was about the weirdest sensation I ever had. It reminded me, I don't know how, exactly of the feeling I had when I was young, and I saw the sunset one evening through the woods after a sleet-storm."

They stared at each other as I went on, and I could see Kendricks's fine eyes kindle with an imaginative appreciation of the literary quality of the coincidence. But when I added, "Did you ever read a poem about the end of the world by that 'City of Deadful Night' man?" Miss Gage impulsively caught me by the coat lapel and shook me.

"Ah, it *was* you all the time! I *knew* there was somebody following us, and I might have *known* who it was!"

We all gave way in a gale of laughter, and sat down on the veranda and had our joke out in full recognition of the fact. When Kendricks rose to go at last I said, "We won't say anything about this little incident to Mrs. March, hey?" And then they laughed again as if it were the finest wit in the world, and Miss Gage

bade me a joyful good night at the head of the stairs as she went off to her room and I to mine.

I found Mrs. March waiting up with a book; and as soon as I shut myself in with her she said, awfully, "What *were* you laughing so about?"

"Laughing? Did you hear me laughing?"

"The whole house heard you, I'm afraid. You certainly ought to have known better, Basil. It was very inconsiderate of you." And as I saw she was going on with more of that sort of thing, to divert her thoughts from my crime I told her the whole story. It had quite the effect I intended up to a certain point. She even smiled a little, as much as a woman could be expected to smile who was not originally in the joke.

"And they had got to comparing weird experiences?" she asked.

"Yes; the staleness of the thing almost made me sick. Do you remember when we first compared our weird experiences? But I suppose they will go on doing it to the end of time, and it will have as great a charm for the last man and woman as it had for Adam and Eve when they compared *their* weird experiences."

"And was that what you were laughing at?"

"We were laughing at the wonderful case of telepathy I put up on them."

Mrs. March faced her open book down on the table before her, and looked at me with profound solemnity. "Well, then, I can tell you, my dear, it is no laughing matter. If they have got to the weird it is very serious; and her talking to him about her family, and his wanting to know about her father, that's serious too —far more serious than either of them can understand. I don't like it, Basil; we have got a terrible affair on our hands."

"Terrible?"

"Yes, terrible. As long as he was interested in her simply from a literary point of view, though I didn't like that either, I could put up with it; but now that he's got to telling her about himself, and exchanging weird experiences with her, it's another thing altogether. Oh, I never wanted Kendricks brought into the affair at all."

"Come now, Isabel! Stick to the facts, please."

"No matter! It was you that discovered the girl, and then something had to be done. I was perfectly shocked when you told me that Mr. Kendricks was in town, because I saw at once that he would have to be got in for it; and now we have to think what we shall do."

"Couldn't we think better in the morning?"

"No; we must think at once. I shall not sleep to-night anyhow. My peace is gone. I shall have to watch them every instant."

"Beginning at this instant. Why not wait till you can see them?"

"Oh, you can't joke it away, my dear. If I find they are really interested in each other I shall have to speak. I am responsible."

"The young lady," I said, more to gain time than anything else, "seems quite capable of taking care of herself."

"That makes it all the worse. Do you think I care for her only? It's Kendricks too that I care for. I don't know that I care for her at all."

"Oh, then I think we may fairly leave Kendricks to his own devices; and I'm not alarmed for Miss Gage either, though I do care for her a great deal."

"I don't understand how you can be so heartless about it, Basil," said Mrs. March, plaintively. "She is a young girl, and she has never seen anything of the world, and of course if he keeps on paying her attention in this way she can't help thinking that he is interested in her. Men never can see such things as women do. They think that, until a man has actually asked a girl to marry him, he hasn't done anything to

warrant her in supposing that he is in love with her, or that she has any right to be in love with him."

"That is true; we can't imagine that she would be so indelicate."

"I see that you're determined to tease, my dear," said Mrs. March, and she took up her book with an air of offense and dismissal. "If you won't talk seriously, I hope you will *think* seriously, and try to realize what we've got in for. Such a girl couldn't imagine that we had simply got Mr. Kendricks to go about with her from a romantic wish to make her have a good time, and that he was doing it to oblige us, and wasn't at all interested in her."

"It does look a little preposterous, even to the outsider," I admitted.

"I am glad you are beginning to see it in that light, my dear, and if you can think of anything to do by morning I shall be humbly thankful. *I* don't expect to."

"Perhaps I shall dream of something," I said more lightly than I felt. "How would it do for you to have a little talk with her—a little motherly talk—and hint round, and warn her not to let her feelings run away with her in Kendricks's direction?" Mrs. March faced her book down in her lap, and listened as if

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there might be some reason in the nonsense I was talking. "You might say that he was a society man, and was in great request, and then intimate that there was a prior attachment, or that he was the kind of man who would never marry, but was really cold-hearted with all his sweetness, and merely had a passion for studying character."

"Do you think that would do, Basil?" she asked.

"Well, I thought perhaps you might think so."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't," she sighed. "All that we can do now is to watch them, and act promptly, if we see that they are really in love, either of them."

"I don't believe," I said, "that I should know that they were in love even if I saw it. I have forgotten the outward signs, if I ever knew them. Should he give her flowers? He's done it from the start; he's brought her boxes of Huyler candy, and lent her books; but I dare say he's been merely complying with our wishes in doing it. I doubt if lovers sigh nowadays. I didn't sigh myself, even in my time; and I don't believe any passion could make Kendricks neglect his dress. He keeps his eyes on her all the time, but that may be merely an effort to divine her character. I don't believe I should know, indeed I don't."

"I shall," said Mrs. March.

XIV.

We were to go the next day to the races, and I woke with more anxiety about the weather than about the lovers, or potential lovers. But after realizing that the day was beautiful, on that large scale of loveliness which seems characteristic of the summer days at Saratoga, where they have them almost the size of the summer days I knew when I was a boy, I was sensible of a secondary worry in my mind, which presently related itself to Kendricks and Miss Gage. It was a haze of trouble merely, however, such as burns off, like a morning fog, when the sun gets higher, and it was chiefly on my wife's account.

I suppose that the great difference between her conscience and one originating outside of New England (if any conscience can originate outside of New England) is that it cannot leave the moral government of the universe in the hands of divine Providence. I was willing to leave so many things which I could not control to the deity, who probably could, that she accused me of fatalism, and I was held to be little

better than one of the wicked because I would not forecast the effects of what I did in the lives of others. I insisted that others were also probably in the hands of the "*somma sapienza e il primo amore*," and that I was so little aware of the influence of other lives upon my own, even where there had been a direct and strenuous effort to affect me, that I could not readily believe others had swerved from the line of their destiny because of me. Especially I protested that I could not hold myself guilty of misfortunes I had not intended, even though my faulty conduct had caused them. As to this business of Kendricks and Miss Gage, I denied in the dispute I now began tacitly to hold with Mrs. March's conscience that my conduct had been faulty. I said that there was no earthly harm in my having been interested by the girl's forlornness when I first saw her; that I did not do wrong to interest Mrs. March in her; that she did not sin in going shopping with Miss Gage and Mrs. Deering; that we had not sinned, either of us, in rejoicing that Kendricks had come to Saratoga, or in letting Mrs. Deering go home to her sick husband and leave Miss Gage on our hands; that we were not wicked in permitting the young fellow to help us make her have a good time. In this colloquy I did all the reasoning,

and Mrs. March's conscience was completely silenced; but it rose triumphant in my miserable soul when I met Miss Gage at breakfast, looking radiantly happy, and disposed to fellowship me in an unusual confidence because, as I clearly perceived, of our last night's adventure. I said to myself bitterly that happiness did not become her style, and I hoped that she would get away with her confounded rapture before Mrs. March came down. I resolved not to tell Mrs. March if it fell out so, but at the same time, as a sort of atonement, I decided to begin keeping the sharpest kind of watch upon Miss Gage for the outward signs and tokens of love.

She said, "When you began to talk that way last night, Mr. March, it almost took my breath, and if you hadn't gone so far, and mentioned about the sunset through the sleety trees, I never should have suspected you."

"Ah, that's the trouble with men, Miss Gage." And when I said "men" I fancied she flushed a little. "We never know when to stop; we always overdo it; if it were not for that we should be as perfect as women. Perhaps you'll give me another chance, though."

"No; we shall be on our guard after this." She

corrected herself and said, "I shall always be looking out for you now," and she certainly showed herself conscious in the bridling glance that met my keen gaze.

"Good heavens!" I thought. "Has it really gone so far?" and more than ever I resolved not to tell Mrs. March.

I went out to engage a carriage to take us to the races, and to agree with the driver that he should wait for us at a certain corner some blocks distant from our hotel, where we were to walk and find him. We always did this, because there were a number of clergymen in our house, and Mrs. March could not make it seem right to start for the races direct from the door, though she held that it was perfectly right for us to go. For the same reason she made the driver stop short of our destination on our return, and walked home the rest of the way. Almost the first time we practiced this deception I was met at the door by the sweetest and dearest of these old divines, who said, "Have you ever seen the races here? I'm told the spectacle is something very fine," and I was obliged to own that I had once had a glimpse of them. But it was in vain that I pleaded this fact with Mrs. March; she insisted that the appearance of not going to the races was something that we owed the cloth, and no

connivance on their part could dispense us from it.

As I now went looking up and down the street for the driver who was usually on the watch for me about eleven o'clock on a fair day of the races, I turned over in my mind the several accidents which are employed in novels to bring young people to a realizing sense of their feelings toward each other, and wondered which of them I might most safely invoke. I was not anxious to have Kendricks and Miss Gage lovers; it would be altogether simpler for us if they were not; but if they were, the sooner they knew it and we knew it the better. I thought of a carriage accident, in which he should seize her and leap with her from the flying vehicle, while the horses plunged madly on, but I did not know what in this case would become of Mrs. March and me. Besides, I could think of nothing that would frighten our driver's horses, and I dismissed the fleeting notion of getting any others because Mrs. March liked their being so safe, and she had, besides, interested herself particularly in the driver, who had a family and counted upon our custom. The poor fellow came in sight presently, and smilingly made the usual arrangement with me, and an hour later he delivered us all sound in wind and limb at the race-course.

I watched in vain for signs of uncommon tenderness

in the two young people. If anything they were rather stiff and distant with each other, and I asked myself whether this might not be from an access of consciousness. Kendricks was particularly devoted to Mrs. March, who, in the airy detachment with which she responded to his attentions, gave me the impression that she had absolutely dismissed her suspicions of the night before, or else had heartlessly abandoned the affair to me altogether. If she had really done this, then I saw no way out of it for me but by an accident which should reveal them to each other. Perhaps some one might insult Miss Gage—some ruffian—and Kendricks might strike the fellow; but this seemed too squalid. There might be a terrible jam, and he interpose his person between her and the danger of her being crushed to death; or the floor of the grand stand might give way, and everybody be precipitated into the space beneath, and he fight his way, with her senseless form on his arm, over the bodies of the mangled and dying. Any of these things would have availed in a novel, and something of the kind would have happened, too. But, to tell the truth, nothing whatever happened, and if it had not been for that anxiety on my mind I should have thought it much pleasanter so.

Even as it was I felt a measure of the hilarity which commonly fills me at a running race, and I began to lose in the charm of the gay scene the sense of my responsibility, and little by little to abate the vigilance apparently left all to me. The day was beautiful; the long heat had burned itself out, and there was a clear sparkle in the sunshine, which seemed blown across the wide space within the loop of the track by the delicate breeze. A vague, remote smell of horses haunted the air, with now and then a breath of the pines from the grove shutting the race-ground from the highway. We got excellent places, as one always may, the grand stand is so vast, and the young people disposed themselves on the bench in front of us, but so near that we were not tempted to talk them over. The newsboys came round with papers, and the boys who sold programmes of the races; from the bar below there appeared from time to time shining negroes in white linen jackets, with trays bearing tall glasses of lemonade, and straws tilted in the glasses. Book-makers from the pool-rooms took the bets of the ladies, who formed by far the greater part of the spectators on the grand stand, and contributed, with their summer hats and gowns, to the gayety of the ensemble. They were of all types, city and country both, and of the Southern

dark as well as the Northern fair complexion, with so thick a sprinkling of South Americans that the Spanish gutterals made themselves almost as much heard as the Yankee nasals. Among them moved two nuns of some mendicant order, receiving charity from the fair gamblers, who gave for luck without distinction of race or religion.

I leaned forward and called Kendricks's attention to the nuns, and to the admirable literary quality of the whole situation. He was talking to Miss Gage, and he said as impatiently as he ever suffered himself to speak, "Yes, yes; tremendously picturesque."

"You ought to get something out of it, my dear fellow. Don't you feel copy in it?"

"Oh, splendid, of course; but it's your ground, Mr. March. I shouldn't feel it right to do anything with Saratoga after you had discovered it," and he turned eagerly again to Miss Gage.

My wife put her hand on my sleeve and frowned, and I had so far lost myself in my appreciation of the scene that I was going to ask her what the matter was, when a general sensation about me made me look at the track, where the horses for the first race had already appeared, with their jockeys in vivid silk jackets of various dyes. They began to form for the start

with the usual tricks and feints, till I became very indignant with them, though I had no bets pending, and did not care in the least which horse won. What I wanted was to see the race, the flight, and all this miserable manœuvring was retarding it. Now and then a jockey rode his horse far off on the track and came back between the false starts; now and then one kept stubbornly behind the rest and would not start with them. How their several schemes and ambitions were finally reconciled I never could tell, but at last the starter's flag swept down and they were really off. Everybody could have seen perfectly well as they sat, but everybody rose and watched the swift swoop of the horses, bunched together in the distance, and scarcely distinguishable by the colors of their riders. The supreme moment came for me when they were exactly opposite the grand stand, full half a mile away—the moment that I remembered from year to year as one of exquisite illusion—for then the horses seemed to lift from the earth as with wings, and to skim over the track like a covey of low-flying birds. The finish was tame to this. Mrs. March and I had our wonted difference of opinion as to which horse had won, and we were rather uncommonly controversial because we had both decided upon the same horse,

as we found, only she was talking of the jockey's colors, and I was talking of the horse's. We appealed to Kendricks, who said that another horse altogether had won the race, and this compromise pacified us.

We were all on foot, and he suggested, "We could see better, couldn't we, if we went farther down in front?" And Mrs. March answered:

"No, we prefer to stay here; but you two can go." And when they had promptly availed themselves of her leave, she said to me, "This is killing me dead, Basil, and if it keeps up much longer I don't believe I can live through it. I don't care now, and I believe I shall throw them together all I can from this out. The quicker they decide whether they're in love or not the better. *I* have some rights too."

Her whirling words expressed the feeling in my own mind. I had the same sense of being trifled with by these young people, who would not behave so conclusively toward each other as to justify our interference on the ground that they were in love, nor yet treat each other so indifferently as to relieve us of the strain of apprehension. I had lost all faith in accident by this time, and I was quite willing to leave them to their own devices; I was so desperate that I said I hoped they would get lost from us, as they had from

me the night before, and never come back, but just keep on wandering round forever. All sorts of vengeful thoughts went through my mind as I saw them leaning toward each other to say something, and then drawing apart to laugh in what seemed an indefinite comradery instead of an irrepressible passion. Did they think we were going to let this sort of thing go on? What did they suppose our nerves were made of? Had they no mercy, no consideration? It was quite like the selfishness of youth to wish to continue in that fool's paradise, but they would find out that middle age had its rights too. I felt capable of asking them bluntly what they meant by it. But when they docilely rejoined us at the end of the races, hurrying up with some joke about not letting me get lost this time, and Miss Gage put herself at my wife's side and Kendricks dropped into step with me, all I had been thinking seemed absurd. They were just two young people who were enjoying a holiday time together, and we were in no wise culpable concerning them.

I suggested this to Mrs. March when we got home, and, in the need of some relief from the tension she had been in, she was fain to accept the theory provisionally, though I knew that her later rejection of it would be all the more violent for this respite.

XV.

There was to be a hop at the Grand Union that night, and I had got tickets for it in virtue of my relation to "Every Other Week." I must say the clerk who gave them me was very civil about it; he said they were really only for the hotel guests, but he was glad to give them to outsiders who applied with proper credentials; and he even offered me more tickets than I asked for.

Miss Gage was getting a dress for the hop, and it was to be finished that day. I think women really like the scare of thinking their dresses will not be done for a given occasion, and so arrange to have them at the last moment. Mrs. March went with the girl early in the afternoon to have it tried on for the last time, and they came home reporting that it was a poem. My wife confided to me that it was not half done—merely begun, in fact—and would never be finished in time in the world. She also assured Miss Gage that she

need not be the least uneasy; that there was not an hour's work on the dress; and that the dressmaker's reputation was at stake, and she would not dare to fail her. I knew she was perfectly sincere in both these declarations, which were, indeed, merely the expression of two mental attitudes, and had no relation to the facts.

She added to me that she was completely worn out with anxiety and worry, and I must not think of her going to the hop. I would have to do the chaperoning for her, and she did hope that I would not forget what I was sent for, or get talking with somebody, and leave Miss Gage altogether to Kendricks. She said that quite likely there might be friends or acquaintances of his at the hop—such a large affair—whom he would want to show some attention, and I must take charge of Miss Gage myself, and try to find her other partners. She drilled me in the duties of my position until I believed that I was letter-perfect, and then she said that she supposed I would commit some terrible blunder that would ruin everything.

I thought that this was very likely, too, but I would not admit it.

The dress came home at nine o'clock, and operated a happy diversion from my imaginable shortcomings;

for it appeared from Mrs. March's asides to me that it was a perfect horror in the set, and that everybody could see that it had been simply *slung* together at the last moment, and she would never, as long as the world stood, go to that woman for anything again.

I must say I could not myself see anything wrong about the dress. I thought it exquisite in tint and texture; a delicate, pale-greenish film that clung and floated, and set off the girl's beauty as the leafage of a flower heightens the loveliness of a flower. I did not dare to say this in the face of Mrs. March's private despair, and I was silent while the girl submitted to be twirled about for my inspection like a statue on a revolving pedestal. Kendricks, however, had no such restrictions upon him, and I could see him start with delight in the splendid vision before he spoke.

"*Isn't* it a poem?" demanded Mrs. March. "Isn't it a perfect *lyric?*"

"Why should you have allowed her to be transported altogether into the ideal? Wasn't she far enough from us before?" he asked; and I found myself wishing that he would be either less or more articulate. He ought to have been mute with passion, or else he ought to have been frankly voluble about the girl's gown, and gone on about it longer. But he

simply left the matter there, and though I kept him carefully under my eye, I could not see that he was concealing any further emotion. She, on her part, neither blushed nor frowned at his compliment; she did nothing by look or gesture to provoke more praise; she took it very much as the beautiful evening might, so undeniably fine, so perfect in its way.

She and the evening were equally fitted for the event to which they seemed equally dedicated. The dancing was to be out of doors on a vast planking, or platform, set up in the heart of that bosky court which the hotel incloses. Around this platform drooped the slim, tall Saratogan trees, and over it hung the Saratogan sky, of a nocturnal blue very rare in our latitude, with the stars faint in its depths, and by and by a white moon that permitted itself a modest competition with the electric lights effulgent everywhere. There was a great crowd of people in the portico, the vestibule, and the inner piazzas, and on the lawn around the platform, where "the trodden weed" sent up the sweet scent of bruised grass in the cool night air. My foolish old heart bounded with a pulse of youth at the thought of all the gay and tender possibilities of such a scene.

But the young people under my care seemed in no haste to mingle in it. We oldsters are always fancying

youth impatient, but there is no time of life which has so much patience. It behaves as if it had eternity before it,—an eternity of youth,—instead of a few days and years, and then the frosty poll. We who are young no longer think we would do so and so if we were young, as women think they would do so and so if they were men; but if we were really young again, we should not do at all what we think. We should not hurry to experience our emotions; we should not press forward to discharge our duties or repair our mistakes; we should not seize the occasion to make a friend or reconcile an enemy; we should let weeks and months go by in the realization of a passion, and trust all sorts of contingencies and accidents to help us out with its confession. The thoughts of youth are very long, and its conclusions are deliberate and delayed, and often withheld altogether. It is age which is tremulously eager in these matters, and cannot wait with the fine patience of nature in her growing moods.

As soon, even, as I was in the hotel I was impatient to press through to the place where the dancing was, and where I already heard the band playing. I knew very well that when we got there I should have to sit down somewhere on the edge of the platform with the

other frumps and fogies, and begin taking cold in my dress-coat, and want to doze off without being able to, while my young people were waltzing together, or else promenading up and down ignoring me, or recognizing me by the offer of a fan, and the question whether I was not simply melting; I have seen how the poor chaperon fares at such times. But they, secure of their fun, were by no means desirous to have it over, or even to have it begin. They dawdled through the thronged hotel office, where other irresponsible pairs were coming and going under the admiring eyes of the hotel loungers, and they wandered up and down the waste parlors, and sat on tête-à-têtes just to try them, apparently; and Miss Gage verified in the mirrors the beauty which was reflected in all eyes. They amused themselves with the extent of the richly carpeted and upholstered desolation around them, where only a few lonely and aging women lurked about on sofas and ottomans; and they fell to playing with their compassion for the plebeian spectators at the long veranda windows trying to penetrate with their forbidden eyes to the hop going on in the court far beyond the intermediary desert of the parlors.

When they signified at last that they were ready for me to lead them on to the dance, I would so much

rather have gone to bed that there are no words for the comparison. Then, when we got to the place, which I should never have been able to reach in the world if it had not been for the young energy and inspiration of Kendricks, and they had put me in a certain seat with Miss Gage's wraps beside me where they could find me, they went off and danced for hours and hours. For hours and hours? For ages and ages! while I withered away amid mouldering mothers, and saw my charges through the dreadful half-dreams of such a state whirling in the waltz, hopping in the polka, sliding in the galop, and then endlessly walking up and down between the dances, and eating and drinking the chill refreshments that it made my teeth chatter to think of. I suppose they decently came to me from time to time, though they seemed to be always dancing, for I could afterward remember Miss Gage taking a wrap from me now and then, and quickly coming back to shed it upon my lap again. I got so chilled that if they had not been unmistakably women's wraps I should have bundled them all about my shoulders, which I could almost hear creak with rheumatism. I must have fallen into a sort of drowse at last; for I was having a dispute with some sort of authority, which turned out to be Mrs. March, and upbraiding

her with the fact that there were no women's wraps which would also do for a man, when the young people stood arm in arm before me, and Miss Gage said that she was tired to death now, and they were going.

But it appeared that they were only going as far as the parlors for the present; for when they reëntered the hotel, they turned into them, and sat down there quite as if that had been the understanding. When I arrived with the wraps, I was reminded of something, and I said, "Have you two been dancing together the whole evening?"

They looked at each other as if for the first time they now realized the fact, and Kendricks said, "Why, of course we have! We didn't know anybody."

"Very well, then," I said; "you have got me into a scrape."

"Oh, poor Mr. March!" cried the girl. "How have we done it?"

"Why, Mrs. March said that Mr. Kendricks would be sure to know numbers of people, and I must get you other partners, for it wouldn't do for you to dance the whole evening together."

She threw herself back in the chair she had taken, and laughed as if this were the best joke in the world.

He said hardily, "You see it *has* done."

"And if it wouldn't do," she gasped, "why didn't you bring me the other partners?"

"Because I didn't know any," I said; and this seemed to amuse them both so much that I was afraid they would never get their breath.

She looked by and by at her dancing-card, and as soon as she could wipe the tears from her eyes she said, "No; there is no other name there;" and this seemed even a better joke than the other from the way they joined in laughing at it.

"Well, now," I said, when they were quiet again, "this won't do, my young friends. It's all very well for you, and you seem to like it; but I am responsible for your having passed a proper evening under my chaperonage, and something has got to be done to prove it." They saw the reasonableness of this, and they immediately became sober. "Kendricks," I asked, "can't you think of something?"

No, he said, he couldn't; and then he began to laugh again.

I applied to her in the same terms; but she only answered, "Oh, don't ask *me*," and she went off laughing, too.

"Very well, then," I said; "I shall have to do something desperate, and I shall expect you both to bear

me out in it, and I don't want any miserable subterfuges when it comes to the point with Mrs. March. Will you let me have your dancing-card, Miss Gage?" She detached it, and handed it to me. "It's very fortunate that Mr. Kendricks wrote his name for the first dance only, and didn't go on and fill it up."

"Why, we didn't think it was worth while!" she innocently explained.

"And that's what makes it so perfectly providential, as Mrs. March says. Now then," I went on, as I wrote in the name of a rising young politician, who happened just then to have been announced as arriving in Saratoga to join some other leaders in arranging the slate of his party for the convention to meet a month later, "we will begin with a good American."

I handed the card to Kendricks. "Do you happen to remember the name of the young French nobleman who danced the third dance with Miss Gage?"

"No," he said; "but I think I could invent it." And he dashed down an extremely probable marquis, while Miss Gage clapped her hands for joy.

"Oh, how glorious! how splendid!"

I asked, "Will you ever give me away the longest day you live?"

"Never," she promised; and I added the name of

a South American doctor, one of those doctors who seem to be always becoming the presidents of their republics, and ordering all their patients of opposite politics to be shot in the plaza.

Kendricks entered a younger son of an English duke, and I contributed the hyphenated surname of a New York swell, and between us we soon had all the dances on Miss Gage's card taken by the most distinguished people. We really studied probability in the forgery, and we were proud of the air of reality it wore in the carefully differenced handwritings, with national traits nicely accented in each.

XVI.

The fun of it all was that Mrs. March was not deceived for an instant. "Oh, nonsense!" she said, when she glanced at our pretty deception, which we presented with perhaps too perfect seriousness. "Then you danced only the first dance?"

"No, no!" Miss Gage protested. "I danced every dance as long as I stayed." She laughed with her handkerchief to her mouth and her eyes shining above.

"Yes; I can testify to that, Mrs. March," said Kendricks, and he laughed wildly, too. I must say their laughter throughout was far beyond the mirthfulness of the facts. They both protested that they had had the best time in the world, and the gayest time; that I had been a mirror of chaperons, and followed them round with my eyes wherever they went like a family portrait; and that they were the most exemplary young couple at the hop in their behavior. Mrs. March asked them all about it, and she joined in their fun with a

hilarity which I knew from long experience boded me no good.

When Kendricks had gone away, and Miss Gage had left us for the night with an embrace, whose fondness I wondered at, from Mrs. March, an awful silence fell upon us in the deserted parlor where she had waited up.

I knew that when she broke the silence she would begin with, "Well, my dear!" and this was what she did. She added, "I hope you're convinced *now!*"

I did not even pretend not to understand. "You mean that they are in love? I suppose that their we-ing and us-ing so much would indicate something of the kind."

"It isn't that alone; everything indicates it. She would hardly let go of him with her eyes. I wish," sighed Mrs. March, and she let her head droop upon her hand a moment, "I could be as sure of him as I am of her."

"Wouldn't that double the difficulty?" I ventured to suggest, though till she spoke I had not doubted that it was the case.

"I should make you speak to him if I were sure of him; but as it is I shall speak to her, and the sooner the better."

"To-night?" I quaked.

"No; I shall let the poor thing have her sleep to-night. But the first thing in the morning I shall speak, and I want you to send her up to me as soon as she's had her breakfast. Tell her I'm not well, and shall not be down; I shall not close my eyes the whole night. And now," she added, "I want you to tell me everything that happened this evening. Don't omit a word, or a look, or a motion. I wish to proceed intelligently."

I hope I was accurate in the history of the hop which I gave Mrs. March; I am sure I was full. I think my account may be justly described as having a creative truthfulness, if no other merit. I had really no wish to conceal anything except the fact that I had not, in my utter helplessness, even tried to get Miss Gage any other partners. But in the larger interest of the present situation, Mrs. March seemed to have lost the sense of my dereliction in this respect. She merely asked, "And it was after you went back to the parlor, just before you came home, that you wrote those names on her card?"

"Kendricks wrote half of them," I said.

"I dare say. Well, it was very amusing, and if the circumstances were different, I could have entered into

the spirit of it too. But you see yourself, Basil, that we can't let this affair go any further without dealing frankly with her. *You* can't speak to her, and *I must.* Don't you see?"

I said that I saw, but I had suddenly a wild wish that it were practicable for me to speak to Miss Gage. I should have liked to have a peep into a girl's heart at just such a moment, when it must be quivering with the unconfessed sense of love, and the confident hope of being loved, but while as yet nothing was assured, nothing was ascertained. If it would not have been shocking, if it would not have been sacrilegious, it would have been infinitely interesting, and from an esthetic point of view infinitely important. I thought that I should have been willing to undergo all the embarrassment of such an inquiry for the sake of its precious results, if it had been at all possible; but I acquiesced that it would not be possible. I felt that I was getting off pretty lightly not to have it brought home to me again that I was the cause of all this trouble, and that if it had not been for me there would have been, as far as Mrs. March was concerned, no Miss Gage, and no love-affair of hers to deal with. I debated in my mind a moment whether I had better urge her to let me speak to Kendricks after all; but

I forbore, and in the morning I waited about in much perturbation, after I had sent Miss Gage to her, until I could know the result of their interview. When I saw the girl come away from her room, which she did rather trippingly, I went to her, and found her by no means the wreck I had expected the ordeal to leave her.

"Did you meet Miss Gage?" she asked.

"Yes," I returned, with tremulous expectation.

"Well, don't you think she looks perfectly divine in that gown? It's one of Mme. Cody's, and we got it for thirty dollars. It would have been fifty in New York, and it was, here, earlier in the season. I shall always come here for some of my things; as soon as the season's a little past they simply *fling* them away. Well, my dear!"

"Well, what?"

"I didn't speak to her after all."

"You didn't! Don't you think she's in love with him, then?"

"Dead."

"Well?"

"Well, I couldn't somehow seem to approach the subject as I had expected to. She was so happy, and so good, and so perfectly obedient, that I couldn't get

anything to take hold of. You see, I didn't know but she might be a little rebellious, or resentful of my interference; but in the little gingerly attempts I did make she was so submissive, don't you understand? And she was very modest about Mr. Kendrick's attentions, and so self-depreciatory that, well—"

"Look here, Isabel," I broke in, "this is pretty shameless of you. You pretend to be in the greatest kind of fidge about this girl; and you make me lie awake all night thinking what you're going to say to her; and now you as much as tell me you were so fascinated with the modest way she was in love that you couldn't say anything to her against being in love on our hands in any sort of way. Do you call this business?"

"Well, I don't care if I *did* encourage her—"

"Oh, you even encouraged her!"

"I *didn't* encourage her. I merely praised Mr. Kendricks, and said how much you thought of him as a writer."

"Oh! then you gave the subject a literary cast. I see! Do you think Miss Gage was able to follow you?"

"That doesn't matter."

"And what do you propose to do now?"

"I propose to do nothing. I think that I have done all my duty requires, and that now I can leave the whole affair to you. It was your affair in the beginning. I don't see why I should worry myself about it."

"It seems to me that this is a very strange position for a lady to take who was not going to close an eye last night in view of a situation which has not changed in the least, except for the worse. Don't you think you are rather culpably light-hearted all of a sudden?"

"I am light-hearted, but if there is any culpability it is yours, Basil."

I reflected, but I failed to find any novelty in the fact. "Very well, then; what do you propose that *I* should do?"

"I leave that entirely to your own conscience."

"And if my conscience has no suggestion to make?"

"That's your affair."

I reflected again, and then I said, more than anything to make her uncomfortable, I'm afraid: "I feel perfectly easy in my conscience, personally, but I have a social duty in the matter, and I hope I shall perform it with more fidelity and courage than you have shown. I shall speak to Kendricks."

She said: "That is just what you ought to do. I'm

quite surprised." After this touch of irony she added earnestly, "And I do hope, my dear, you will use judgment in speaking to him, and tact. You mustn't go at it bluntly. Remember that Mr. Kendricks is not at all to blame. He began to show her attention to oblige us, and if she has fallen in love with him it is our fault."

"I shall handle him without gloves," I said. "I shall tell him he had better go away."

I was joking, but she said seriously, "Yes; he must go away. And I don't envy you having to tell him. I suppose you will bungle it, of course."

"Well, then, you must advise me," I said; and we really began to consider the question. We could hardly exaggerate the difficulty and delicacy of the duty before me. We recognized that before I made any explicit demand of him I must first ascertain the nature of the whole ground and then be governed by the facts. It would be simple enough if I had merely to say that we thought the girl's affections were becoming engaged, and then appeal to his eager generosity, his delicate magnanimity; but there were possible complications on his side which must be regarded. I was to ascertain, we concluded, the exact nature of the situation before I ventured to say anything openly. I

was to make my approaches by a series of ambushes before I unmasked my purpose, and perhaps I must not unmask it at all. As I set off on my mission, which must begin with finding Kendricks at his hotel, Mrs. March said she pitied me. She called me back to ask whether I thought I had really better do anything. Then, as I showed signs of weakening, she drove me from her with, "Yes, yes! You must! You must!"

XVII.

It was still so early that I had my doubts whether I should find Kendricks up after the last night's revelry, but he met me half-way between our hotel and his. He said he was coming to see how Mrs. March was bearing Miss Gage's immense success at the ball; but perhaps this was not his sole motive. He asked frankly how the young lady was, and whether I thought Mrs. March would consider a lunch at a restaurant by the lake a good notion. When I said I had very little doubt she would, and proposed taking a turn in the park before I went back with him, he looked at his watch, and laughed, and said he supposed it *was* rather early yet, and came very willingly with me.

We had the pretty place almost to ourselves at that hour. There were a half-dozen or so nursemaids, pushing their perambulators about, or standing the vehicles across the walk in front of the benches where they sat, in the simple belief of all people who have

to do with babies that the rest of the world may be fitly discommoded in their behalf. But they did not actively molest us, and they scarcely circumscribed our choice of seats. We were by no means driven to the little kiosk in the lake for them, and I should rather say that we were fatefully led there, so apt were the associations of the place to my purpose. Nothing could have been more natural than that I should say, as we sat down there, "This was where I first saw Miss Gage with her friends;" and it was by a perfectly natural transition that I should go on to speak, in a semi-humorous strain, of the responsibility which Mrs. March and myself had incurred by letting our sympathy for her run away with us. I said I supposed that if we had not been willing from the first to try to realize for her some of the expectations we imagined she had in coming to Saratoga, she never would have fallen to our charge; that people really brought a great many more things upon themselves than they were willing to own; and that fate was perhaps more the fulfillment of our tacit ambitions than our overt acts. This bit of philosophy, which I confess I thought fine, did not seem to impress Kendricks. He merely said that it must be great fun to have the chance of baffling the malice of circumstance in a case like that, and I

perceived that he felt nothing complex in the situation. In fact, I doubt whether youth perceives anything complex in life. To the young life is a very plain case. To be sure, they are much more alarmed than their elders at getting tangled up in its web at times, but that is because they have not had our experience in getting untangled, and think they are never going to get out alive. When they do, they think that it is the only tangle they are ever going to be in, and do not know that they are simply going on from one to another as long as there is enough of them left to be caught in a mesh. To Kendricks we Marches were simply two amiable people, who had fancied doing a pleasant thing for a beautiful girl that accident had thrown it in our power to befriend, and were by no means the trembling arbiters of her destiny we felt ourselves to be. The difference between his objective sense and my subjective sense was the difference between his twenty-seven years and my fifty-two, and while this remained I saw that it would be useless to try to get on common ground with him, or to give him our point of view. If I were to speak to him at all, it must be with authority, with the right of one who stood in the place of the girl's parents, and had her happiness at heart. That is, it was something like

that; but my words say it too bluntly. I found myself beginning, "I have rather had a notion that her father might come on, and take the enterprise off our hands," though, to tell the truth, I had never imagined such a thing, which came into my head at that moment through an association with the thought of parents.

"Have you any idea what sort of man he is?" asked Kendricks.

"Oh, some little local magnate, president of the village, and president of the village bank; I fancy the chief figure in the place, but probably as ignorant of our world as a Cherokee."

"Well, I don't know," said the young fellow. "Do you think that follows because he doesn't live in it?" I could see that he did not quite like what I had said. "I suppose ours is rather a small world."

"The smallest of all worlds," I answered. "And in the eyes of Papa Gage, if they could once be focused upon it, our world would shrivel to an atom."

"Do you think," he asked, with a manifest anxiety, "that it would in hers?"

"No; she is not the American people, and her father is, as I fancy him. I make out from the vague hints that Brother Deering (as Fulkerson would call him) dropped when he talked about him that Papa

Gage is a shrewd, practical, home-keeping business man, with an eye single to the main chance, lavish, but not generous, Philistine to the back-bone, blindly devoted to his daughter, and contemptuous of all the myriad mysteries of civilization that he doesn't understand. I don't know why I should be authorized to imagine him personally long and lank, with possibly a tobacco habit of some sort. His natural history, upon no better authority, is that of a hard-headed farmer, who found out that farming could never be more than a livelihood, and came into the village, and began to lend money, and get gain, till he was in a position to help found the De Witt Point National Bank, and then, by weight of his moneyed solidity, imposed himself upon the free and independent voters of the village—a majority of them under mortgage to him—and became its president. It isn't a pleasant type, but it's ideally American."

"Yes," said Kendricks, ruefully.

"But his daughter," I continued, "is probably altogether different. There is something fine about her—really fine. Our world wouldn't shrivel in her eye; it would probably swell up and fill the universe," I added by an impulse that came from nowhere irresistibly upon me: "that is, if she could see *you* in it."

"What do you mean?" he asked with a start.

"Oh, now I must tell you what I mean," I said desperately. "It's you that have complicated this case so dreadfully for us. Can't you think why?"

"No, I can't," he said; but he had to say that.

His fine, sensitive face flamed at once so fire-red that it could only turn pale for a change when I plunged on: "I'm afraid we've trifled with her happiness;" and this formulation of the case disgusted me so much that I laughed wildly, and added, "unless we've trifled with yours, too."

"I don't know why you call it trifling with happiness," he returned with dignity, but without offense. "If you will leave her out of the question, I will say that you have given me the greatest happiness of my life in introducing me to Miss Gage."

"Now," I demanded, "may I ask what *you* mean? You know I wouldn't if I didn't feel bound for her sake, and if you hadn't said just what you have said. You needn't answer me unless you like! It's pleasant to know that you've not been bored, and Mrs. March and I are infinitely obliged to you for helping us out."

Kendricks made as if he were going to say something, and then he did not. He hung his head lower and lower in the silence which I had to break for him:

"I hope I haven't been intrusive, my dear fellow. This is something I felt bound to speak of. You know we couldn't let it go on. Mrs. March and I have blamed ourselves a good deal, and we couldn't let it go on. But I'm afraid I haven't been as delicate with you—"

"Oh! delicate!" He lifted his head and flashed a face of generous self-reproach upon me. "It's *I* that haven't been delicate with *you*. I've been monstrously indelicate. But I never meant to be, and —and—I was coming to see you just now when we met—to see you—Miss Gage—and ask her—tell her that we—I—must tell you and Mrs. March— Mr. March! At the hop last night I asked her to be my wife, and as soon as she can hear from her father— But the first thing when I woke this morning, I saw that I must tell Mrs. March and you. And you—you must forgive us—or me, rather; for it was my fault— for not telling you last night—at once—oh, thank you! thank you!"

I had seized his hand, and was wringing it vehemently in expression of my pleasure in what he had told me. In that first moment I felt nothing but pure joy and an immeasurable relief. I drew my breath, a very deep and full one, in a sudden, absolute free-

dom from anxieties which had been none the less real and constant because so often burlesqued. Afterward considerations presented themselves to alloy my rapture, but for that moment, as I say, it was nothing but rapture. There was no question in it of the lovers' fitness for each other, of their acceptability to their respective families, of their general conduct, or of their especial behavior toward us. All that I could realize was that it was a great escape for both of us, and a great triumph for me. I had been afraid that I should not have the courage to speak to Kendricks of the matter at all, much less ask him to go away; and here I had actually spoken to him, with the splendid result that I need only congratulate him on his engagement to the lady whose unrequited affections I had been wishing him to spare. I don't remember just the terms I used in doing this, but they seemed satisfactory to Kendricks; probably a repetition of the letters of the alphabet would have been equally acceptable. At last I said, "Well, now I must go and tell the great news to Mrs. March," and I shook hands with him again; we had been shaking hands at half-minutely intervals ever since the first time.

XVIII.

I saw Mrs. March waiting for me on the hotel veranda. She wore her bonnet, and she warned me not to approach, and then ran down to meet me.

"Well, my dear," she said, as she pushed her hand through my arm and began to propel me away from the sight and hearing of people on the piazza, "I hope you didn't make a fool of yourself with Kendricks. They're engaged!"

She apparently expected me to be prostrated by this stroke. "Yes," I said, very coolly; "I was just coming to tell you."

"How did you know it? Who told you? Did Kendricks? I don't believe it!" she cried in an excitement not unmixed with resentment.

"No one told me," I said. "I simply divined it."

She didn't mind that for a moment. "Well, I'm glad he had the grace to do so, and I hope he did it before you asked him any leading questions." With-

out waiting to hear whether this was so or not, she went on, with an emphasis on the next word that almost blotted it out of the language, "*She* came back to me almost the instant you were gone, and told me everything. She said she wanted to tell me last night, but she hadn't the courage, and this morning, when she saw that I was beginning to hint up to Mr. Kendricks a little, she hadn't the courage at all. I sent her straight off to telegraph for her father. She is behaving splendidly. And now, what are *we* going to do?"

"What the rest of the world is—nothing. It seems to me that we are out of the story, my dear. At any rate, I sha'n't attempt to compete with Miss Gage in splendid behavior, and I hope *you* won't. It would be so easy for us. I wonder what Papa Gage is going to be like."

I felt my thrill of apprehension impart itself to her. "Yes!" she gasped; "what if he shouldn't like it?"

"Well, then, that's his affair." But I did not feel so lightly about it as I spoke, and from time to time during the day I was overtaken with a cold dismay at the thought of the unknown quantity in the problem.

When we returned to the hotel after a tour of the block, we saw Kendricks in our corner of the veranda with Miss Gage. They were both laughing convul-

sively, and they ran down to meet us in yet wilder throes of merriment.

"We've just been comparing notes," he said, "and at the very moment when I was telling you, Mr. March, Julia was telling Mrs. March."

"Wonderful case of telepathy," I mocked. "Give it to the Psychical Research."

They both seemed a little daunted, and Miss Gage said, "I know Mr. March doesn't like the way we've done."

"Like it!" cried Mrs. March, contriving to shake me a little with the hand she still had in my arm. "Of course he likes it. He was just saying *you* had behaved splendidly. He said *he* wouldn't attempt to compete with you. But you mustn't regard him in the least."

I admired the skill with which Isabel saved her conscience in this statement too much to dispute it; and I suppose that whatever she had said, Miss Gage would have been reassured. I cannot particularly praise the wisdom of her behavior during that day, or, for the matter of that, the behavior of Kendricks either. The ideal thing would have been for him to keep away now till her father came, but it seemed to me that he was about under our feet all the while, and that she,

so far from making him remain at his own hotel, encouraged him to pass the time at ours. Without consulting me, Mrs. March asked him to stay to dinner after he had stayed all the forenoon, and he made this a pretext for spending the afternoon in our corner of the veranda. She made me give it up to him and Miss Gage, so that they could be alone together, though I must say they did not seem to mind us a great deal when we were present; he was always leaning on the back of her chair, or sitting next her with his hand dangling over it in a manner that made me sick. I wondered if I was ever such an ass as that, and I quite lost the respect for Kendricks's good sense and good taste which had been the ground of my liking for him.

I felt myself withdrawn from the affair farther and farther in sympathy, since it had now passed beyond my control; and I resented the strain of the responsibility which I had thrown off, I found, only for a moment, and must continue to suffer until the girl's father appeared and finally relieved me. The worst was that I had to bear it alone. It was impossible to detach Mrs. March's interest from Miss Gage as a girl who had been made love to long enough to enable her to realize her as a daughter with filial ties and duties. She did try in a perfunctory way to do it, but I could

see that she never gave her mind to it. I could not even make her share my sense of my own culpability, a thing she was only too willing to do in most matters. She admitted that it was absurd for me to have let my fancy play about the girl when I first saw her until we felt that I must do something for her; but I could not get her to own that we had both acted preposterously in letting Mrs. Deering leave Miss Gage in our charge. In the first place, she denied that she had been left in our charge. She had simply been left in the hotel where we were staying, and we should have been perfectly free to do nothing for her. But when Kendricks turned up so unexpectedly, it was quite natural we should ask him to be polite to her. Mrs. March saw nothing strange in all that. What was I worrying about? What she had been afraid of was that he had not been in love with the girl when she was so clearly in love with him. But now!

"And suppose her father doesn't like it?"

"Not like Mr. Kendricks!" She stared at me, and I could see how infatuated she was.

I was myself always charmed with the young fellow. He was not only good and generous and handsome, and clever—I never thought him a first-class talent—but he was beautifully well bred, and he was very well

born, as those things go with us. That is, he came of people who had not done much of anything for a generation, and had acquired merit with themselves for it. They were not very rich, but they had a right to think that he might have done nothing, or done something better than literature; and I wish I could set forth exactly the terms, tacit and explicit, in which his mother and sisters condoned his dereliction to me at a reception where he presented me to them. In virtue of his wish to do something, he had become a human being, and they could not quite follow him; but they were very polite in tolerating me, and trying to make me feel that I was not at all odd, though he was so queer in being proud of writing for my paper, as they called it. He was so unlike them all that I liked him more than ever after meeting them. Still, I could imagine a fond father, as I imagined Miss Gage's father to be, objecting to him, on some grounds at least, till he knew him, and Mrs. March apparently could not imagine even this.

I do not know why I should have prefigured Miss Gage's father as tall and lank. She was not herself so very tall, though she was rather tall than short, and though she was rather of the Diana or girlish type of goddess, she was by no means lank. Yet it was in

this shape that I had always thought of him, perhaps through an obscure association with his fellow-villager, Deering. I had fancied him saturnine of spirit, slovenly of dress, and lounging of habit, upon no authority that I could allege, and I was wholly unprepared for the neat, small figure of a man, very precise of manner and scrupulous of aspect, who said, "How do you do, sir? I hope I see you well, sir," when his daughter presented us to each other, the morning after the eventful day described, and he shook my hand with his very small, dry hand.

I could not make out from their manner with each other whether they had been speaking of the great matter in hand or not. I am rather at a loss about people of that Philistine make as to what their procedure will be in circumstances where I know just what people of my own sort of sophistication would do. These would come straight at the trouble, but I fancy that with the other sort the convention is a preliminary reserve. I found Mr. Gage disposed to prolong, with me at least, a discussion of the weather, and the aspects of Saratoga, the events of his journey from De Witt Point, and the hardship of having to ride all the way to Mooer's Junction in a stage-coach. I felt more and more, while we bandied these futilities, as

if Mr. Gage had an overdue note of mine, and was waiting for me, since I could not pay it, to make some proposition toward its renewal; and he did really tire me out at last, so that I said, "Well, Mr. Gage, I suppose Miss Gage has told you something of the tremendous situation that has developed itself here?"

I thought I had better give the affair such smiling character as a jocose treatment might impart, and the dry little man twinkled up responsively so far as manner was concerned. "Well, yes, yes. There has been some talk of it between us," and again he left the word to me.

"Mrs. March urged your daughter to send for you at once because that was the right and fit thing to do, and because we felt that the affair had now quite transcended our powers, such as they were, and nobody could really cope with it but yourself. I hope you were not unduly alarmed by the summons?"

"Not at all. She said in the despatch that she was not sick. I had been anticipating a short visit to Saratoga for some days, and my business was in a shape so that I could leave."

"Oh!" I said vaguely, "I am very glad. Mrs. March felt, as I did, that circumstances had given us a certain obligation in regard to Miss Gage, and we were

anxious to discharge it faithfully and to the utmost. We should have written to you, summoned you, before, if we could have supposed—or been sure; but you know these things go on so obscurely, and we acted at the very first possible moment. I wish you to understand that. We talked it over a great deal, and I hope you will believe that we studied throughout—that we were most solicitous from beginning to end for Miss Gage's happiness, and that if we could have foreseen or imagined—if we could have taken any steps—I trust you will believe—" I was furious at myself for being so confoundedly apologetic, for I was thinking all the time of the bother and affliction we had had with the girl; and there sat that little wooden image accepting my self-inculpations, and apparently demanding more of me; but I could not help going on in the same strain: "We felt especially bound in the matter, from the fact that Mr. Kendricks was a personal friend of ours, whom we are very fond of, and we both are very anxious that you should not suppose that we promoted, or that we were not most vigilant—that we were for a moment forgetful of your rights in such an affair—"

I stopped, and Mr. Gage passed his hand across his little meager, smiling mouth.

"Then he is not a connection of yours, Mr. March?"

"Bless me, no!" I said in great relief; "we are not so swell as that." And I tried to give him some notion of Kendricks's local quality, repeating a list of agglutinated New York surnames to which his was more or less affiliated. They always amuse me, those names, which more than any in the world give the notion of social straining; but I doubt if they affected the imagination of Mr. Gage, either in this way or in the way I meanly meant them to affect him.

"And what did you say his business was?" he asked, with that implication of a previous statement on your part which some people think it so clever to make when they question you.

I always hate it, and I avenged myself by answering simply, "Bless my soul, he has no business!" and letting him take up the word now or not, as he liked.

"Then he is a man of independent means?"

I could not resist answering, "Independent means? Kendricks has no means whatever." But having dealt this blow, I could add, "I believe his mother has some money. They are people who live comfortably."

"Then he has no profession?" asked Mr. Gage, with a little more stringency in his smile.

"I don't know whether you will call it a profession. He is a writer."

"Ah!" Mr. Gage softly breathed. "Does he write for your—paper?"

I noted that as to the literary technicalities he seemed not to be much more ignorant than Kendricks's own family, and I said, tolerantly, "Yes; he writes for our magazine."

"Magazine—yes; I beg your pardon," he interrupted.

"And for any others where he can place his material."

This apparently did not convey any very luminous idea to Mr. Gage's mind, and he asked after a moment, "What kind of things does he write?"

"Oh, stories, sketches, poems, reviews, essays—almost anything in fact."

The light left his face, and I perceived that I had carried my revenge too far, at least for Kendricks's advantage, and I determined to take a new departure at the first chance. The chance did not come immediately.

"And can a man support a wife by that kind of writing?" asked Mr. Gage.

I laughed uneasily. "Some people do. It depends upon how much of it he can sell. It depends upon how handsomely a wife wishes to be supported. The

result isn't usually beyond the dreams of avarice," I said, with a desperate levity.

"Excuse me," returned the little man. "Do you live in that way? By your writings?"

"No," I said with some state, which I tried to subdue; "I am the editor of 'Every Other Week,' and part owner. Mr. Kendricks is merely a contributor."

"Ah," he breathed again. "And if he were successful in selling his writings, how much would he probably make in a year?"

"In a year?" I repeated to gain time. "Mr. Kendricks is comparatively a beginner. Say fifteen hundred—two thousand—twenty-five hundred."

"And that would not go very far in New York."

"No; that would not go far in New York." I was beginning to find a certain pleasure in dealing so frankly with this hard little man. I liked to see him suffer, and I could see that he did suffer; he suffered as a father must who learns that from a pecuniary point of view his daughter is imprudently in love. Why should we always regard such a sufferer as a comic figure? He is, if we think of it rightly, a most serious, even tragical figure, and at all events a most respectable figure. He loves her, and his heart is torn between the wish to indulge her and the wish to do

what will be finally best for her. Why should our sympathies, in such a case, be all for the foolish young lovers? They ought in great measure to be for the father, too. Something like a sense of this smote me, and I was ashamed in my pleasure.

"Then I should say, Mr. March, that this seems a most undesirable engagement for my daughter. What should you say? I ask you to make the case your own."

"Excuse me," I answered; "I would much rather not make the case my own, Mr. Gage, and I must decline to have you consult me. I think that in this matter I have done all that I was called upon to do. I have told you what I know of Mr. Kendricks's circumstances and connections. As to his character, I can truly say that he is one of the best men I ever knew. I believe in his absolute purity of heart, and he is the most unselfish, the most generous—"

Mr. Gage waved the facts aside with his hand. "I don't undervalue those things. If I could be master, no one should have my girl without them. But they do not constitute a livelihood. From what you tell me of Mr. Kendricks's prospects, I am not prepared to say that I think the outlook is brilliant. If he has counted upon my supplying a deficiency—"

"Oh, excuse me, Mr. Gage! Your insinuation—"

"Excuse *me!*" he retorted. "I am making no insinuation. I merely wish to say that, while my means are such as to enable me to live in comfort at De Witt Point, I am well aware that much more would be needed in New York to enable my daughter to live in the same comfort. I'm not willing she should live in less. I think it is my duty to say that I am not at all a rich man, and if there has been any supposition that I am so, it is a mistake that cannot be corrected too soon."

This time I could not resent his insinuation, for since he had begun to speak I had become guiltily aware of having felt a sort of ease in regard to Kendricks's modesty of competence from a belief, given me, I suspect, by the talk of Deering, that Mr. Gage had plenty of money, and could come to the rescue in any amount needed. I could only say, "Mr. Gage, all this is so far beyond my control that I ought not to allow you to say it to me. It is something that you must say to Mr. Kendricks."

As I spoke I saw the young fellow come round the corner of the street, and mount the hotel steps. He did not see me, for he did not look toward the little corner of lawn where Mr. Gage and I had put our

chairs for the sake of the morning shade, and for the seclusion that the spot afforded us. It was at the angle of the house farthest from our peculiar corner of the piazza, whither I had the belief that the girl had withdrawn when she left me to her father. I was sure that Kendricks would seek her there, far enough beyond eyeshot or earshot of us, and I had no doubt that she was expecting him.

"You are Mr. Kendricks's friend—"

"I have tried much more to be Miss Gage's friend; and Mrs. March—" It came into my mind that she was most selfishly and shamelessly keeping out of the way, and I could not go on and celebrate her magnanimous impartiality, her eager and sleepless vigilance.

"I have no doubt of that," said the little man, "and I am very much obliged to you for all the trouble you have taken on my daughter's account. But you are his friend, and I can speak to you much more fully and frankly than I could to him."

I did not know just what to say to this, and he went on: "In point of fact, I don't think that I shall speak to him at all."

"That is quite your affair, my dear sir," I said dryly. "It isn't to be supposed that you would seek an interview with him."

"And if he seeks an interview with me, I shall decline it." He looked at me defiantly and yet interrogatively. I could see that he was very angry, and yet uncertain.

"I must say, then, Mr. Gage, that I don't think you would be right."

"How, not right?"

"I should say that in equity he had a full and perfect right to meet you, and to talk this matter over with you. He has done you no wrong whatever in admiring your daughter, and wishing to marry her. It's for you and her to decide whether you will let him. But as far as his wish goes, and his expression of it to her, he is quite within his rights. You must see that yourself."

"I consider," he answered, "that he *has* done me a wrong in that very thing. A man without means, or any stated occupation, he had no business to speak to my daughter without speaking to me. He took advantage of the circumstances. What does he think? Does he suppose I am *made* of money? Does he suppose I want to support a son-in-law? I can tell you that if I were possessed of unlimited means, I should not do it." I began to suspect that Deering was nearer right, after all, in his representations of the man's finan-

cial ability; I fancied something of the anxiety, the tremor of avarice, in his resentment of poor Kendricks's possible, or rather impossible, designs upon his pocket. "If he had any profession, or any kind of business, I should feel differently, and I should be willing to assist him to a reasonable degree; or if he had a business training, I might take him in with me; but as it is, I should have a helpless burden on my hands, and I can tell you I am not going in for that sort of thing. I shall make short work of it. I shall decline to meet Mr. Hendricks, or Kendricks, and I shall ask you to say as much to him from me."

"And I shall decline to be the bearer of any such message from you, Mr. Gage," I answered, and I saw, not without pleasure, the bewilderment that began to mix with his arrogance.

"Very well, then, sir," he answered, after a moment; "I shall simply take my daughter away with me, and that will end it."

The prim little, grim little man looked at me with his hard eyes, and set his lips so close that the beard on the lower one stuck out at me with a sort of additional menace. I felt that he was too capable of doing what he said, and I lost myself in a sense of his sordidness, a sense which was almost without a trace of compassion.

It seemed as if I were a long time under the spell of this, and the sight of his repugnant face; but it could really have been merely a moment, when I heard a stir of drapery on the grass near us, and the soft, rich voice of Miss Gage saying, "Papa!"

We both started to our feet. I do not know whether she had heard what he said or not. We had spoken low, and in the utmost vehemence of his speech he did not lift his voice. In any case, she did not heed what he said.

"Papa," she repeated, "I want you to come up and see Mrs. March on the piazza. And—Mr. Kendricks is there."

I had a wild desire to laugh at what followed, and yet it was not without its pathos. "I—I—hm! hm! I—cannot see Mr. Kendricks just at present. I—the fact is, I do not want to see him. It is better—not. I think you had better get ready to go home with me at once, daughter. I—hm!—cannot approve of any engagement to Mr. Kendricks, and I—prefer not to meet him." He stopped.

Miss Gage said nothing, and I cannot say that she looked anything. She simply *clouded up*, if I may so express the effect that came and remained upon her countenance, which was now the countenance she had

shown me the first evening I saw her, when I saw the Deerings cowering in its shadow. I had no need to look at the adamantine little man before her to know that he was softening into wax, and, in fact, I felt a sort of indecency in beholding his inteneration, for I knew that it came from his heart, and had its consecration through his love for her.

That is why I turned away, and do not know to this moment just how the change she desired in him was brought about. I will not say that I did not look back from a discreet distance, and continue looking until I saw them start away together and move in the direction of that corner of the piazza where Kendricks was waiting with Mrs. March.

It appeared, from her account, that Mr. Gage, with no uncommon show of ill-will, but with merely a natural dryness, suffered Kendricks to be presented to him, and entered upon some preliminary banalities with him, such as he had used in opening a conversation with me. Before these came to a close Mrs. March had thought it well to leave the three together.

Afterward, when we knew the only result that the affair could have, she said, "The girl has a powerful will. I wonder what the mother was like."

"Yes; evidently she didn't get that will from her

father. I have still a sense of exhaustion from it in our own case. What do you think it portends for poor Kendricks?"

"Poor Kendricks?" she repeated thoughtfully. "Yes; in that sense I suppose you might call him poor. It isn't an equal thing as far as nature, as character, goes. But isn't it always dreadful to see two people who have made up their minds to get married?"

"It's very common," I suggested.

"That doesn't change the fact, or lessen the risk. She is very beautiful, and now he is in love with her beautiful girlhood. But after a while the girlhood will go."

"And the girl will remain," I said.

THE END.

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